



LECTURES  
ON THE  
HISTORY OF FRANCE.

BY  
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# LECTURES.

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## LECTURE XVI.

### ON THE REFORMATION AND THE WARS OF RELIGION.

To have emancipated the human mind from the errors of Papal Rome, is but one of the many triumphs of the Reformation. In almost every part of the Christian world, that great religious enfranchisement was followed by civil liberty, as at once its offspring and its guardian. But in France it was otherwise; and I proceed to inquire, how it happened that the protest made by so large a part of the French people against the tyranny of the Roman Church, was not followed by any effectual resistance to the despotism of the reigning dynasty. To render the answer to that question intelligible, it is necessary that I should indicate some of the principal steps of the progress of the Reformation in that kingdom; and if that preface should appear disproportionately long, I would bespeak your indulgence till it shall appear, what are the uses to which it is to be at length applied.

For the Protestant Reformers of the 16th century has been claimed a spiritual lineage, ascending, in unbroken succession, though the Moravians, the disciples of Huss and of Wicliff, the Albigenses, and the Paulicians, until it reaches the primitive ages of Christianity. For another

race of Reformers has been traced a different genealogy, ascending through Savonarola, Gerson, D'Ailly, and Bernard of Clairvaux, until it reaches the Fathers of many ancient synods, who clung with passionate fondness to the Church which they endeavoured at once to purify and to maintain. To subdue the first of these generations of men by terror, and the second by blandishments, had, during many ages, been the office of the Papacy, when a new and irresistible power interposed as the arbiter in that protracted strife. The human mind, aroused from the slumber of centuries, announced, in ten thousand different but concurring voices, that the dominion of ignorance and of superstition was drawing to a close. Luther made that proclamation to the potentates assembled at Worms, in the year 1521; and, in the same year, the doctrines of Luther were, for the first time, publicly announced in France. The city of Meaux, which was destined to become, in a future age, the episcopal seat of the greatest of all the opponents of the Reformation, enjoyed, at that time, the nobler distinction of becoming the cradle of the Reformed Faith in the French monarchy.

Of that faith, James Lefevre and William Farel were the earliest confessors. Lefevre had nearly completed his seventieth year, Farel had not quite attained the age of twenty-four. Each of them had derived his new opinions from the study of the Scriptures, and they lived together in the interchange of that touching affection, which occasionally unites the aged and the young. The contemplative spirit of the old man and the fervour of his youthful associate were blended together in harmonious concert and mutual co-operation. Nor were they long dependent only on each other's aid. They found, at once, a patron and a fellow-labourer in William Briçonnet, the bishop of the diocese. He assisted them in publishing a translation of the Evangelists, and in preaching the Evangelical doctrines. Nor did they preach in vain. So extensive and so lasting

was their influence that, throughout the first half of the 16th century, a "heretic of Meaux" became the popular name in France for an antagonist of the See of Rome.

But against such heretics the voice of the Sorbonne was raised with a resentment whetted by the keen sense of some galling indignities. They had lately published a decree in which Luther was compared to Mahomet; and Melancthon had derided it as "the wild production of certain Parisian Theologasters, of doctors under whose guidance it was the ill fortune of France to be placed." Such doctors were not, however, to be laughed at with impunity. They cited Bishop Briçonnet before the Parliament of Paris, and extorted from him a humiliating retraction of his imputed errors. John le Clerc, another of the heretics of Meaux, became, on this occasion, the protomartyr of the Reformation in France. Farel fled into Dauphiné, where he preached in the dry beds of winter torrents, or in the mountain fastnesses, until he was compelled to seek refuge in Basel. Lefevre escaped to Nerac, there to close his long life under the protection of Marguerite of Valois.

That lady holds an eminent place in the history, both of the literature and of the reformation, of her native land. Every one will, indeed, gladly cherish the disbelief of her authorship of the collection of Tales for which she is celebrated; for they egregiously violate the delicacy of her sex, and the decencies of society. Or, if the evidence on which they are ascribed to her pen should be thought irresistible, let us not refuse to her memory the excuse afforded by the manners of her times; nor forget how nobly the fault was repaired by the sanctity of her later writings, and by her generous protection of all who in her days were persecuted for conscience sake.

She was the only sister, and the cherished friend, of Francis I.; but it is difficult to say to which of the conflicting creeds of their generation either of them was really

attached. The religion of Francis, indeed, consisted chiefly in the worship of the idol, Glory. He sought to propitiate that capricious power by many costly offerings—by eclipsing the achievements of Charles V.—by rivalling the splendour of Henry VIII.—by combining all the majesty of the first of European kings with all the gallantry of the first of European gentlemen—and by a munificent patronage of letters and of art. Yet *le Roi Chevalier* was rather a great actor, than a great agent, in the affairs of the world. His principles of conduct were continually overborne by the gusts of his transitory passions; and, both in the religious and the political controversies of his times, he changed his position and his alliances with the promptitude and the fickleness characteristic of all such unruly emotions. *Marguerite*, on the contrary, although her own personal belief seems to the last to have been unsettled, was inflexible in her zeal for the defence of the persons and the doctrines of the Reformers. Sometimes her influence with Francis arrested his severities towards them, and sometimes his influence with her prevented her acceptance of their opinions. Many years of their lives were passed in this affectionate contest, which seems to have cemented, instead of diminishing, the love which they bore to each other. Ill fared it with any who, presuming on the superstitious weaknesses of either, dared to bring that affection to any hazardous test.

Thus *Marguerite*, having introduced several reformed preachers into the pulpits of Paris, the whole clerical body of the city revenged themselves against her for the insult. At the College of Navarre, the monks exhibited a play, in which she underwent a dismal metamorphosis from a student of the Bible into a *dæmon* enveloped in flames. The more serious Sorbonne promulgated a decree, censuring her writings as heretical; and a *Cordelier* had the hardihood to recommend from his pulpit, that she should be tied up in a sack and thrown into the Seine. Monks, Doctors, and *Cordeliers* were instantly sentenced, by the in-

dignant king, to humiliating punishments; though scarcely had his wrath been appeased by their sufferings, when his passions veered round to the precisely opposite quarter.

The day-dream of the life of Francis was the conquest of the Milanese. An alliance with the Tuscan and the Papal Courts appeared to promise the fulfilment of that hope; and such an alliance might, as it then seemed, be cemented by the marriage of Henry, the eldest son of Francis, to Catherine de Medici, the niece of Clement VII. That pope having arrived in person at Marseilles, Francis, therefore, hastened thither to conclude with him this double compact, nuptial and political; and then, animated with a new zeal for the Papacy, he returned to Paris, to gratify the Monks, Doctors, and Cordeliers, whom he had so recently chastised, by silencing their opponents, and dispersing their flocks. The Reformers did not endure these wrongs with their accustomed equanimity. In an evil moment they covered the walls of Paris, and even the door of the royal chamber, with placards containing unmeasured invectives against the mass, and the other observances and doctrines peculiar to their antagonists. Such an outrage on his religion and his person kindled an unquenchable fury in the soul of Francis, who commanded the immediate seizure and persecution of all the heretics; and either himself arranged, or assented to the arrangement by others of, a religious procession, which was designed to enhance the solemnity of his proceedings against them.

In most countries fêtes are but the idle pastimes of an idle day. In France it is often otherwise. The Fête of Paris, of the 29th January, 1535, was as momentous in its results, as it was imposing in its ceremonial. In the midst of a countless assemblage, thronging every street and house-top, appeared the king, preceded by all the sacred relics of his capital, and by all the ecclesiastical dignitaries who bore them, and followed by the princes of his blood, and by the various councillors and courts, guilds



## THE REFORMATION AND

and companies of the city. Mass had been sung, and a royal banquet had been served, when, ascending his throne in the presence of his people, Francis solemnly announced his resolution to punish all heresy with death, and not to spare even his own children if they should be guilty of it. "Nay," he exclaimed, as he raised aloft his arm, "if this hand were infected with that disease, this other hand should chop it off." Such words, from such a speaker, were not addressed in vain to such an audience. I advance reluctantly to the close of the narrative. The festivities of the day were ended by suspending six heretics from as many beams, which turned horizontally on a pivot, in such a manner that the revolutions of each beam brought the sufferers, one after another, over a furnace, into which they were successively plunged, until, by repeated immersions in that bath of fire, they were all at length destroyed. On that hideous spectacle Francis himself deliberately gazed! The people of Paris, maddened by this taste of blood, gave way to a ferocity which, during five successive reigns, scarcely ever ceased to offer new victims to Moloch in the name of the Prince of Peace. From this era, their fierce and unrelenting hostility to the Reformers takes its commencement. The fanaticism which was then aroused, was satiated, at the distance of twenty-seven years, by the massacre of St. Bartholomew.

But, notwithstanding his domestic and political alliance with the Pope, Francis had concluded with the Protestant League, at Smalcalden, another confederacy, of which the object was the depression of the House of Austria. The intelligence of the persecutions of their brethren at Paris excited the liveliest resentment amongst the members of that league; and they indignantly intimated to Francis their purpose of making common cause with the emperor against himself, as the deadliest enemy of the faith of the Reformers. To avert the displeasure of his German allies, Francis made concessions, promises, and apologies. He

assured them that the victims of the Fête of January, 1535, had been punished, not for their religion, but for their offences against the state ; and, availing himself of the ever ready weapon supplied by the disunion of the Reformers, he added the assurance that they were not Lutherans but Sacramentarians.

This defence of the recent atrocities at Paris was read at Basel, by John Calvin. To defend his persecuted brethren against the calumnies of their persecutors, was one of the many motives of his publication, in August 1535, of his *Christian Institutes*. It announced to the world that the Reformation in France had at length found a leader and a head.

At the age of twelve (such were the habits of the times) Calvin had received the presentation of an ecclesiastical benefice, but by the diligent study of the Bible, he became a zealous adherent and teacher of the reformed faith before he had completed twice that number of years. Having been compelled, by the doctors of the Sorbonne, to fly for his life from Paris, he taught the Gospel in Poitou ; and there may yet be seen near Poitiers a cave, bearing his name, in commemoration of his having been accustomed to celebrate divine worship within its dark recesses. Driven from this and every other place of refuge in France, he at length found shelter at Basel.

In a future lecture I shall have occasion to advert to the literary merits of the great work which he published in that city. The religious influence which attended it is incalculable. It was received by the whole body of the Protestants in France as the standard around which they might all rally. It ascertained their doctrine, determined their discipline, and regulated their ecclesiastical organisation.

Within a year from the appearance of his *Institutes*, Calvin was nominated to be a minister of the Gospel at Geneva, and a professor of the college at that city. There

he established, in his own person, a theocratic sovereignty; while by his books, his letters, and his missionaries, he governed the Reformed churches in France. The heretics of Meaux now assumed the name of Calvinists.

So vast were the literary, ministerial, and public labours of Calvin, that the history of them would appear altogether fabulous, if it were not verified partly by his existing works, and partly by the testimony of his intimate friend and constant associate, Theodore Beza. It is a tale which reduces to a comparatively dwarfish stature, the most imposing of those giants of intellectual industry, on whom we are accustomed to gaze with the liveliest admiration. His moral and religious character are free from any recorded stain, except the execution of Servetus; on which subject, however, no one is entitled to pronounce a peremptory judgment, until he shall have read the elucidations of it, for which we are indebted to MM. Guizot and Mignet, and which will be found under the head of "Calvin," in the *Musée des Protestants célèbres*. The faults, or infirmities, usually imputed to him are, the love of power, the impatience of contradiction, and a disposition irascible, severe, and reserved. As he says of himself that he was of a *naturel sauvage et honteux*, I will not venture to undertake the defence of his temper against his own self-condemnation. But it is hardly a reasonable ground of censure, that power should have been dear to a man who, by the immediate gift of the Creator himself, had been invested with so eminent and unapproachable a superiority over his fellow-men. Neither is it intelligible why any one who had devoted such an intellect as his to studies of such surpassing energy and perseverance, and who had derived from them such immutable convictions as he possessed, should be blamed for a stern disregard of those garrulous gainsayers, to whom patience of thought was an unknown mental exercise, and in whose mouths freedom of thought was an empty and unmeaning boast.

Judge, however, of Calvin as we may, it is impossible to deny him a place among the most illustrious of the conquerors whom history has recorded,— of the conquerors whose weapons were intellectual only, and whose dominion had its seat in the minds of their own and of succeeding generations. For in him the Protestants of France, of Switzerland, of the seven United Provinces, of Scotland, and of New England; with the Puritans, the Presbyterians, and the Independents of the other American States and of our own country, have ever recognised, or have been bound to recognise, their spiritual patriarch and ecclesiastical dictator. In the age in which he lived, such a dictatorship was indeed indispensable. If left without the guidance of some commanding intellect, the Huguenots of France could never (as far as mere human observation extends) have maintained their inevitable contest with their secular and spiritual antagonists.

It was a contest, not for toleration, but for existence. The ever-versatile Francis had, indeed, occasionally assumed the office of protector of the Reformers in Germany, but he had never failed recklessly to abandon it whenever such a change was required by his apparent interests. Thus, his alliance with the confederates of Smalcalden was forgotten as soon as his new policy prompted that other alliance which, under the mediation of Paul III., he concluded with Charles V., for the extermination of heresy throughout their respective dominions. And fearfully was that engagement fulfilled, when, in the year 1545, the Baron Ompeda (emulous, as it might seem, of the infamy of Simon de Montfort), under the sanction, or at least the supposed sanction, of Francis, massacred the last remnant of the Waldenses in Provence. The story of their sufferings is too shocking to be needlessly recited. It provoked a cry of indignation from one end of the kingdom to the other; for the religious wars had not as yet steeled the hearts of the French people to every sense

of humanity. It agitated the dying moments of Francis himself, who, maintaining that Ompeda had far exceeded his orders, bequeathed to his son, Henry II., with the crown of France, the duty of punishing that imputed transgression.

Henry invoked in vain the sentence of the Parliament of Paris against Ompeda. But, in his reign, the Huguenots might bear with the greater patience the impunity of their enemies, since they then rejoiced in a vast and unforeseen increase in the strength and number of their friends. It was the era of the highest prosperity of the Reformation in France. Many of the greatest provinces, and of the chief provincial capitals, became, in appearance, Protestant — a change to be chiefly ascribed to the profound conviction, then generally diffused throughout the land, of the truth of the new doctrines; but not to that cause exclusively. For it is peculiar to the French Reformation, and characteristic of it, that the converts from the old opinions were chiefly made, not among the poor and illiterate, but among the wealthy, the learned, and the great. Many secular motives concurred with higher impulses in recommending to them such a change. The provincial nobles had long cherished a deep resentment against the sacerdotal order, as usurpers of their territorial rights and seigniorial privileges. The judges and lawyers were jealous of the encroachments of the ecclesiastical on their own forensic authority. The merchants had discovered that there was, in the other parts of Europe, some mysterious link between the Protestant opinions and the prosperity of trade. The men of letters, whether lay or clerical, naturally turned their eyes to that quarter in which the range of speculative inquiry was enlarged, and the dominion of the human intellect extended.

Thus, neither authors, nor presses, nor money, were wanting to the diffusion of the Calvinistic creed. United into one great secret society, by a system of arbitrary

signs, the Reformers traversed the country secure of a hospitable shelter; holding their assemblies in barns, or caves, or forest glades; and disseminating books and pamphlets throughout the whole of France, under the cover of mercantile consignments, or of pedlars' packages; while the ladies of the new faith increased its influence by exhibiting in their own persons a severe model of all the virtues of the female character. "I shall turn Huguenot myself (exclaimed Catherine de Medici in one of her sportive moods), that I also may pass for a prude and a dévote."

Her husband Henry harboured no such fancies, either in earnest or in jest. He had completed his twenty-ninth year when he ascended the throne of France — an elevation which if crowns were won by royal qualities alone he never could have attained. He was formed to enjoy, and to diffuse around him, the delights of society in its most brilliant and luxurious forms; and to shine among the foremost of the graceful, accomplished, good-humoured, and indolent votaries of pleasure. In the dance, or the tournament, as a carpet knight, he might have safely indulged his feeble dependence on friends and favourites. In the council chamber as a king, he indulged it to the ruin of his kingdom. Abdicating to Anne de Montmorenci, to Francis Duke of Guise, and to Diana of Poitiers, the real sovereignty of France, he laid the basis of those factions which, during the reign of each of his sons, desolated the kingdom with misery and bloodshed.

Of the wrongs and cruelties done upon our earth, how vast is the proportion for which easiness of temper is responsible! Too obliging to refuse anything to his mistress and his favourites, Henry II. gratified them by the first of that long series of iniquitous edicts against the Huguenots, which deform the collection of the laws of the French kings. Enacted in 1551, and called the edict of Châteaubriant, it decreed that any one accused of heresy might be tried, in succession, both by the secular and by

the spiritual courts,—that, if convicted by either, the offender should at once be executed, even pending his appeal from that conviction,—that no one should intercede for his pardon,—that a third of his estate should be the reward of the informer,—and that every one suspected of heresy should incur these penalties, unless he should, by sufficient evidence, prove that suspicion to be unfounded. It might have been supposed that the wickedness and folly of such a law could be surpassed only by the wickedness and folly with which it was carried into execution. But the Cardinal of Lorraine, the Sorbonne, and Pope Paul IV. meditated a yet lower depth of iniquity. In the name of that pontiff, but at their instance, appeared in 1557 a bull, establishing the Inquisition in France. In the name of Henry, and at the instance of the same advisers, appeared a royal edict to carry that bull into execution. But there were yet some limits to the subserviency of the French people. The Parliament of Paris refused to register the edict, although the king himself in person commanded it. They were inflexibly firm, and he characteristically flexible; and the contest, therefore, ended in the deliverance of his kingdom from the infamy and the woes which his fatal facility of disposition would otherwise have inflicted on it.

But, confident in their new and continually increasing strength, the French Reformers were roused by these injuries to a measure of self-defence, and of self-assertion, which, to all who could read the signs of the times, announced the swift approach of a deadly conflict between the hosts which arranged themselves under the opposite banners of Geneva and of Rome. Hitherto the Calvinists had met and worshipped together, at whatever times and places, and with whatever forms, the conveniences or exigencies of the passing moment suggested. Now they resolved to constitute themselves into a great national church, with ascertained laws, a regular organisation, and

predetermined observances. Accordingly, on the 25th of May, 1559, a general synod of all the Protestant congregations of the kingdom was solemnly convened, and deliberately holden in the city of Paris.

The ecclesiastical system adopted by this assembly was dictated by their great patriarch Calvin. It was prefaced by a general confession of the faith of the Reformed churches of France, and that confession was nothing less than an epitome of the doctrine taught in his own *Institution Chrétienne*; the great fundamental article of all being, that the supreme rule, and single criterion of truth among them was to be the revealed word of God. Then proceeding to the organisation of their ecclesiastical polity, this solemn compact provided that, whenever the faithful were living contiguously to each other in numbers sufficient to form a separate local church, they should unite in electing a consistory (that is, a body of ruling elders), in calling a minister, and in providing for the celebration of the divine ordinances. All subsequent vacancies among the consistory, or in the ministry, were to be filled up by the elders, but subject to an effective veto on the part of the congregation. A certain number of local churches were each to elect an elder, who, with the respective ministers of all, were to form the conference of that locality. The kingdom of France being then divided into provinces (sixteen was the usual number of them), a provincial synod was to be holden annually in every province, composed of all the ministers within its precincts, and of one elder to be elected by each of the local churches which the province might comprise. At the summit of this hierarchy was placed a national synod, which was to meet once in each year, and to be composed of two ministers, and of two elders representing each of the provincial synods. The conferences were to govern, in the first instance, the local churches within their several limits. The provincial synods were to have a jurisdiction at once



concurrent with, and superior to, that of the conferences. The national synod was to be both the ultimate tribunal, and the supreme legislature, of the whole body of the Protestant Church of France. Substitute for these titles the words presbyteries, kirk sessions, and general assembly, and you have here a complete prototype of the existing National Church of Scotland.

A great social revolution had thus been effected. Within the centre of the French monarchy, Calvin and his disciples had established a spiritual republic, and had solemnly recognised, as the basis of it, four principles, each germinant of results of the highest importance to the political commonwealth. Those principles were, — first, that the will of the people was the one legitimate source of the power of their rulers, — secondly, that power was most properly delegated by the people to their rulers by means of elections, in which every adult man might exercise the right of suffrage, — thirdly, that, in ecclesiastical government, the clergy and the laity were entitled to an equal and co-ordinate authority, — and, fourthly, that, between the Church and the State, no alliance or mutual dependence, or other definite relation, necessarily or properly subsisted. The ultimate results of this decisive advance of the Calvinistic party will be considered hereafter. The immediate consequence of it was to bring to light the fact, that in the bosom of the Parliament of Paris were concealed many of the followers of Calvin who had hitherto wanted courage to avow themselves.

Of this number was Anne Dubourg, himself a magistrate of eminent learning, and the descendant of a family illustrious amongst the magistracy of France. In his place in the parliament, and in the presence of Henry, he now ventured not only to invoke a national council for the reform of religion in France, but even to denounce the persecution of heretics as a crime against Him whose holy name they were accustomed to adore with their dying

breath. Dubourg expiated this audacity with his death. But, before the grave had been opened for him, it had closed on his royal persecutor. The accidental stroke of the lance of Count Montgomery, at the tournament of June, 1559, terminated the reign and life of Henry, and transferred his crown to his eldest son, Francis II.

Francis ascended the throne of his ancestors when he had scarcely completed his sixteenth year; and the possession of the real government of France, under the name of the young and feeble king, became the prize for which three unscrupulous rivals eagerly contended.

First in rank, as in just pretensions, was the queen-mother, Catherine de Medici. She is one of those persons on the historical portraitures of whom it is painful and humiliating to dwell. None of them throw any doubt on her courage, her energy, or her commanding talents; and none of them ascribe to her any of the qualities we love, or of the virtues we esteem. They represent her to us as a living impersonation of the ideal "Prince" of her countryman Machiavelli; as engaged, throughout her long life, in the unremitting pursuit of dominion:—of dominion on any terms, but as best pleased to obtain it by craft, by treachery, and by intrigue;—as rendering every other desire subservient to this one master passion;—as sacrificing to it even her conjugal and her maternal affections;—and as exhibiting the frightful aspect of a woman who, without human sympathies, or religious principles, submitted herself to the despotism of a blind selfishness, which shame could never daunt, and conscience could never restrain. For the sake of our common nature, let us trust that these pictures have been discoloured by the too natural indignation and abhorrence of those from whom we have received them; though, even if the colours be really too dark, it is, I fear, too late now to attempt any correction of the error.

The second of the aspirants for the government of the

king and of his kingdom, was Francis, Duke of Guise. Just forty-six years before this time, his father, Claude of Lorraine, had quitted that duchy in search of better fortunes in France; bringing thither, as the Protestant writers say, "nothing more than a stick in his hand, and one servant behind him." In France he became the father of four daughters and of six sons, of whom Francis, Duke of Guise, was the eldest, and Charles, Cardinal of Lorraine, was the second. The Duke was a skilful, high spirited, irascible, and unscrupulous soldier, who had achieved great glory by the defence of Metz, by the capture of Calais, and by the victory of Renty. The Cardinal, on the other hand, was so remarkable for personal cowardice, that he was himself accustomed to make it the subject of his own pleasantry. It was united (no infrequent union) to a graceful elocution, insinuating manners, a penetrating foresight of coming events, and exquisite subtlety in the conduct of affairs. But the Cardinal was also the victim of that chronic fever of ambition from which timid men are usually exempt; and was haunted by importunate visions of the French crown resting on his brother's head, and of the papal tiara alighting on his own.

The third candidate for the administration of the government of France was Antoine, the head of the house of Bourbon, and therefore the first prince of the blood royal, next after the brothers of the king. He bore the title of King of Navarre, in right of Jane d'Albret his wife, who was the titular queen of that almost nominal sovereignty. The chief purpose of the otherwise purposeless existence of Anthony was to exchange his empty title of King of Navarre for the dominion of some real kingdom in any place, and on any terms. He was one of those men whose characters shift with the shifting events of each successive day, or with the uncertain mood of each new associate. With the Calvinists he would chant hymns in the *Pré-aux-Clercs* at Paris, and with the Catholics he

would attend a Calvinistic auto-da-fé at the Place de Grève.

Such having been the three aspirants to the Regency, it remains to notice their great antagonist, Gaspard de Coligny, the military hero of the French Reformation. He was the second of the three sons of the Comte de Châtillon, and of the sister of the Constable Montmorency. Having either acquired or confirmed his religious opinions by the study of the Scriptures during a protracted captivity which he underwent as a prisoner of war after the battle of St. Quentin, he regarded the honours and emoluments of the world with a holy indifference, and, with the exception of his titular office of Admiral of France, renounced all the high and lucrative employments in the state which he had previously enjoyed. In the domestic privacy to which he retired, he became an example of the most severe self-discipline, united to a fervent and habitual devotion. In the civil wars into which he was afterwards drawn, nothing was wanting to his glory except success; for he was an unfortunate commander, and though a braver man never drew his sword even in the armies of France, yet, in the critical moments of battle, he was deficient in promptitude and decision. His younger brother D'Andelôt was also a gallant but ill-fated officer in the Huguenot ranks; while his elder brother, Odêt Châtillon, who had become a cardinal in his seventeenth year, and had married in his maturer days, ended his life in England as an exile.

Coligny and his friends were the dupes of the artifices by which Catherine paved her sure, though slow and cautious, path to the nominal regency and real sovereignty of France. To conciliate their favour she assumed the appearance of a humble inquirer into the grounds of their doctrines, and they, with glad credulity, hailed her as a new Esther, born for the deliverance of the persecuted votaries of the truth.

The Duke of Guise and the Cardinal of Lorraine pursued a more direct and ingenuous course than hers. Having effected the marriage of the king to their niece, Mary, Queen of Scots, they seized upon all the highest stations of public trust and authority — the Duke becoming general in chief of the royal forces — the Cardinal assuming the superintendence of the royal finances. Never had the throne of France been more completely overshadowed by those who had mounted on its footsteps, since the Merovingian kings had bowed to the supremacy of the mayors of their palace.

The powers thus gained by the Princes of Lorraine were zealously employed for the destruction of the Calvinists. In every parliament in the kingdom they established Chambers, charged with the especial office of trying, and consigning to the flames, all persons guilty of heresy; and which, for that reason, received the appropriate title of *Chambres ardentes*. The Calvinists, while exasperated by these persecutions, were brought into frequent intercourse with the military suitors of the treasury, whose just but unwelcome demands the Cardinal-superintendent had repelled with intolerable indignities. Mutually cherishing each other's resentments against their common enemies, the two parties concerted together a plan for subverting, by their united arms, the usurped power of the Duke and Cardinal. The casuists of the Huguenots encouraged the design, teaching that such resistance would not be unlawful if conducted under the guidance of a prince of the blood royal, and if sanctioned by the States General of the realm. Louis de Condé, the brother of the King of Navarre, consented to fulfil the first of these conditions; and it was resolved by the confederates, that, in due time, the second also should be accomplished. With their passions excited, and their consciences tranquillised, they therefore resolved to seize the persons of the King, the Cardinal, and the Duke, in order that justice might be

done upon the new mayors of the palace, and that the new Childeric might be transferred to a more faithful guardianship.

The conspiracy of Amboise (for so the project was called from the place at which it was to be carried into effect) was defeated by the treachery of one of the conspirators. The punishments which followed are too horrible for description. Hundreds perished by the hands of the public executioners, and hundreds, bound hands and feet together, were thrown into the Loire. And thus, in the year 1560, were exactly anticipated the Noyades of the Revolution; except, indeed, that a Prince of the Church, Charles, Cardinal of Lorraine, took the place of the butcher Carrier; and except that Catherine de Medici, and her ladies of honour, assumed, in this dismal tragedy, characters to which, even in the frenzy of the Reign of Terror, the vilest of the Poissardes of Paris would scarcely have descended.

Nor were these the only disasters in which this ill-concerted scheme involved the Huguenots. They soon learnt with terror, that it had supplied the Duke of Guise with a pretext for assuming the office of Lieutenant General of France, and for extorting from the king a promise to sanction whatever acts he might do in that capacity; and that it had afforded the Cardinal of Lorraine an excuse for establishing, by the royal edict of Romorantin, an episcopal tribunal in every diocese of the realm, for the trial and punishment of heresy.

But deep called unto deep. The alarmed and exasperated Huguenots, confident in their strength, or deriving courage from despair, rose in many parts of France to repel, or at least to punish, their antagonists. Throughout the South and West of the kingdom, a large proportion of the churches were seized for their use, and devoted to their public worship; while, in Dauphiné and Provence, they celebrated that worship sword in hand, and then

pillaged the property of the Catholics, and abused the persons of their priesthood. Anarchy and civil war were everywhere brooding over the distracted land.

In the midst of these tumults was raised a voice, earnestly and pathetically inculcating toleration and peace. It was the voice of the party called *Les Politiques*, of which the Chancellor l'Hôpital was the head. They spoke with all the energy of wisdom and of truth, and with all the authority of the highest rank and reputation to which any statesmen of that age had risen in France by their own unaided and personal merits. Nor did they speak altogether in vain; for not even Guise, or his brother, could resist their instances that the Huguenots should at least be heard in their own vindication.

In August, 1560, therefore, Coligny appeared before the king and an assembly of Notables, who had been convened for that purpose at Fontainebleau. Presenting to them the written petition of the whole Reformed Church of the kingdom, he demanded the royal assent to their request for the free performance of their public worship. "Your petition," replied the king, "bears the signature of no one." "True sire," rejoined Coligny, "but if you will allow us to meet for the purpose, I will, in one day, obtain in Normandy alone 50,000 signatures." Even if the number was exaggerated, it was an exaggeration which, from such lips, indicated a reality full of danger. Long and anxious were the debates which followed. They resulted in a decision to convene both the States General of the kingdom and a National Council, to decide what should be the religious faith of the French people. Neither they, nor any other people, had as yet learnt, that any such absolute unity of belief and of worship was not really possible, and that, if possible, it was not even to be desired.

I attempted, in a former lecture, to explain the general motives which had induced all the four great political

parties in France to concur in the convocation of the States General of Orleans. But there was yet a further motive which recommended that measure to the Princes of Lorraine. It promised them a favourable opportunity for the execution of two atrocious treasons. Assuming that the convention of the representatives of the kingdom would lull the Huguenots into a false security, they meditated a military massacre, which, by destroying many of them in every province, was to strike at the very roots of the new heresy. Assuming, also, that the two Princes of the House of Bourbon would present themselves at Orleans, unprotected by any armed force, they had arranged a plan for the seizure and destruction of them both. This part of their project was, at least, partly accomplished. For, when Louis of Condé entered the city, he was arrested by the followers of Guise, on a charge of participation in the conspiracy of Amboise. His brother, Anthony of Navarre, who accompanied him, was introduced into the presence of the king, where assassins stood ready to plunge their daggers into his bosom as soon as Francis should have given the appointed signal. The heart of the royal boy, however, revolted at the last moment from the contemplated murder, and Anthony survived that perilous interview. Very shortly afterwards Francis was mercifully removed, by a sudden death, from the snares which environed his path. His less happy brother, Charles IX., succeeded him.

This event was, in effect, a revolution. The Princes of Lorraine, no longer allied to the sovereign, retired into a comparative obscurity. Their contemplated massacre was postponed to the day of St. Bartholomew. Condé was discharged from prison, and absolved of his imputed crimes; Anthony of Navarre became Lieutenant General of France; Montmorency resumed his high office of Constable; and the Queen-mother, becoming Regent, governed the person and kingdom of her infant son.



The States General of Orleans, though not productive of any direct measure in favour of the Reformers, materially promoted the interest of the Reformation. They had recognised the great principle of religious tolerance, and had, therefore, given new courage to the disciples of Calvin. Ever watchful of such changes, Catherine of Medici once more presented herself in the character of a devout inquirer into the truth of the new opinions. The halls of her palace of Fontainebleau were thrown open to a Huguenot preacher. "It seemed," says the Jesuit Maimbourg, "as though the whole court had become Calvinist. Though it was mid Lent, their tables were covered with meat, and they made sport of images and indulgences, of the worship of the Saints, of the ceremonies of the Church, and of the authority of the Pope." In the midst of such scenes the Reformers gave way to a not unnatural enthusiasm. Sometimes they addressed eulogies to the Queen-mother and the King of Navarre, and sometimes exhortations. Troops of missionaries from Geneva traversed the kingdom, and occupied the pulpits of France. Devotional and controversial writings were scattered from the Rhine to the Pyrenees as thickly as the leaves of autumn; and the more sanguine Huguenots believed in the approaching triumph of Calvin and his creed.

This exultation aroused the vigilance, and reanimated the hopes, of the Princes of Lorraine. The famous courtesan, Diana of Poitiers, was still living, the ready instrument of any intrigue; and by her intervention was cemented that memorable alliance to which the French historians gave the name of the "Catholic Triumvirate." The whole military strength of France was under the command of St. André, a dissolute soldier, and of Montmorency the constable. To each of them Diana proposed an alliance with Guise; to each were offered great pecuniary advantages; whilst, to stimulate the family pride of

Montmorency, he was assiduously reminded of the welcome legend, that his great ancestor was the first baron and first Christian of France, and that he himself was, therefore, the hereditary defender of the faith and hierarchy of Rome.

This new confederacy restored to the House of Lorraine the military strength of which the death of Francis had deprived them, and enabled Guise to re-appear, with renewed courage, in the royal council chamber. His returning influence there was speedily manifested. It gave occasion to the enactment of what was called the Edict of July, 1561,—an edict which bespoke his unrelenting, yet cautious, animosity to the Huguenots; for, while it forbade their public assemblies, it tolerated their private exercise of social worship, forbade all injuries against them on the ground of their religious opinions, and intimated a national council for adjusting the religious controversies by which the realm was agitated. Such a synod accordingly met at Poissy, within a month from the date of this edict.

The days of chivalry were giving place to the days of polemics, and the jousts of knights armed *cap-à-pie* were superseded by the theological tournaments of men of the gown. The one combat was, however, almost as unprofitable as the other. When the controversialists met at Poissy, they found all the most essential laws of their battlefield wholly undetermined, and incapable of any determination. What were to be the questions to which the debate was to be confined? The Huguenots insisted, that the whole compass of doctrinal opinion was to be open to attack and defence. The Catholics, that the authority of the Church, and the Real Presence, must be finally decided before any other point was handled. What was to be the test of faith? "Holy Scripture alone," exclaimed the reforming party. "Holy Scripture as interpreted by primæval traditions, and by the Fathers and Councils," rejoined the

adherents of the Papacy. Who are to adjudicate the victory between the disputants? "The Civil Government," answered the Calvinists. "The Hierarchy of the Church," replied their antagonists. To what good end then debate at all, in the face of such irreconcilable disputes as to the terms of the disputation? To that question the common answer of both parties was,—we debate, not in the hope of conquering our antagonists, but in the belief that we shall encourage our friends; and we take this method of appealing, from our prejudiced opponents to the world at large, against the calumnies of which our persons are the objects, and by which our doctrines are daily misrepresented.

To the Doctors of the Sorbonne, indeed, such an appeal appeared eminently unwise. Twelve of them presented themselves before Catherine, at Poissy, with a protest against it. Such discussions, they said, did not tend to edification, and especially when carried on in presence of a king whose tender years made him so peculiarly obnoxious to error. "I have good reasons for what I have done," answered Catherine; "and it is too late to recede now; but (she added significantly) do not disturb yourselves, all will go well." It was a prophecy of which (in the sense in which it was made) she had taken good care to insure the fulfilment.

In the refectory of the great convent at Poissy, appeared therefore, on the 9th September, 1561, King Charles IX., a boy of eleven years of age, seated on his throne, having on one side of him, the members of his family, the officers and ladies of his court; and, on the other side, six cardinals, with a vast array of bishops and of doctors. The boy-king addressed them in a formal speech; the Chancellor l'Hôpital in a conciliatory, wise, and almost Protestant, oration. At the close of these harangues, the Huguenots were, for the first time, introduced. Twelve of them were ministers, and the remaining twenty-two, lay-deputies

of the Calvinistic churches. Calvin himself was absent, because the French Court had refused to give the securities for his safety, which the Republic of Geneva had demanded. In his stead appeared Theodore Beza, at once the most intimate of his friends, and the most eminent of his disciples. Nor was it a substitution to be regretted by their adherents; for, however much inferior to Calvin in other respects, Beza far surpassed him in all the graces of elocution, and still retained the captivating amenity of manners for which he had been distinguished in his early years, and in the courtly circles in which those years had been passed.

The grave and simple habiliments of Beza and his associates contrasted strangely with the gorgeous apparel of their mitred antagonists. Nor were those humble-looking men received into the presence of that royal and ecclesiastical pageantry as colleagues to deliberate on equal terms, but rather as culprits standing at the bar to undergo a trial. Undaunted by the indignity, Beza first knelt down and audibly implored the divine blessing on the assemblage; and then, amidst the profound attention of his audience, proceeded to recite and to interpret the articles of the Calvinistic creed. His eloquence had been progressively winning a signal triumph, until it reached a passage in which, though admitting the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, he denied his bodily presence there. "His body," he exclaimed, "is as remote from bread and wine as heaven is remote from earth." Indignant clamours interrupted, though they did not eventually silence, the speaker; and, after an adjournment of seven days, the synod was again assembled to listen to the answer which, in the interval, had been carefully prepared for the Cardinal of Lorraine. He maintained with great applause, first, the supreme authority of the Church; and, secondly, the doctrine of transubstantiation; and concluded by demanding that, before the debate proceeded any further, his

opponents should prove their candour by subscribing each of the two propositions which he had thus demonstrated. The demand was of course ineffectual. An insuperable obstacle to any further proceedings having thus been quickly, and perhaps fortunately, discovered, the synod was brought to an early and premature conclusion.

The theologians who had composed it remained, however, two weeks longer at Poissy, and held some private conferences there in a smaller chamber of the convent. Their meetings were productive of a few passages rather more exhilarating than either the theme itself, or the characters of those who handled it, might have seemed to promise. Thus, for example, the Cardinal of Lorraine tendered to Beza for his signature certain articles respecting the doctrine of transubstantiation extracted from the Confession of Augsburg, to which, therefore (sarcastically observed the Cardinal), there can of course be no objection. "Your eminence will therefore begin," answered Beza, "by attaching your own signature." "Not I," replied the Cardinal; "I am not bound to subscribe to the declarations of any master." "You will scarcely then expect us," rejoined Beza, "to accept the very confession which you have yourself rejected." Bossuet reproaches the Calvinistic disputant with escaping the dilemma by a subtlety. He might with equal reason have reproached the Cardinal for the subtlety with which he had attempted thus to avail himself of the dispute between the Lutheran and the Calvinistic Churches.

A far more formidable opponent than the Cardinal next presented himself in the person of Iago Laynez, the second general of the Jesuits, at once the most eloquent, learned, and astute of all those in union with whom Loyola had laid the foundation of his order. But, on this occasion, Laynez lost himself, like many a great orator before and since his time, in the mazes of a long and intractable metaphor; and afforded to Beza the triumph, so dangerous

to the most eloquent adversary, of raising a general laugh at his expense.

Catherine listened to these debates with a secret contempt for the dispute and the disputants. She thought that they were contending about words only; and she inferred that they would consequently rejoice to terminate their warfare by a verbal compromise. At her instance, therefore, a formulary was prepared respecting the real presence in the Eucharist, with which Beza was reasonably, and the Cardinal of Lorraine indolently, satisfied. The Doctors of the Sorbonne, more learned and more sincere than the Cardinal, however, rejected it with indignation. And now rhetoric and learning, pleasantry and double-mindedness, having each in turn attempted to bring the interlocutors at Poissy to some agreement, and having all attempted it in vain, the meeting broke up. It had distinctly convinced most men that such a dispute could not be adjusted by any weapon less keen than the sword. To L'Hôpital and his partisans it had suggested the far more important conclusions, that, in such a dispute, neither the sword nor the pen could really gain a final victory, but that mutual forgiveness and toleration might render any such victory superfluous.

Yet, on the whole, the result of the synod or conference of Poissy was advantageous to the Calvinists. They had been publicly admitted into the presence of their sovereign to explain and to justify their doctrines. They had been heard with attention, if not with deference. The two religions had been allowed to stand so far on a footing of equality, that each had invoked in its support, not material force, but the reason of man illuminated by the written or unwritten revelations of God. In every part of France large accessions were consequently made to the number of the Reformers. Urgent demands for additional teachers were addressed to the Swiss and Genevese churches. Farel, now far advanced in years, re-appeared in his native

country, and preached the Gospel to large and enthusiastic assemblages. In the immediate vicinity of Paris itself, Beza addressed congregations which his followers estimated as sometimes rising to 40,000 people, and which his enemies acknowledged to have been seldom less than 8,000. He even celebrated the marriage of the Count and Countess of Rohan, in the presence of the Queen of Navarre and of Condé; and Coligny presented to the Queen-mother a list of 2,150 reformed congregations, over each of which separate ministers presided. The number of the Huguenots at that time in France was believed by some to amount to a half, and, by the least sanguine, to a tenth, of the whole population of the realm. L'Hôpital is said to have inferred, from all the facts within his reach, that the population of the Huguenots to the Catholics was as one to three. But such calculations, or conjectures, must, always and everywhere, be delusive. They proceed upon two fundamental errors—the first, that every member of society holds *some* fixed and deliberate religious belief; the second, that all who do not avowedly reject the established faith, are among its real adherents. But, all the world over, the formal assenters to that faith outnumber the avowed dissenters from it; and in religious, as well as in political, controversy, the world is ever governed by minorities.

Thus the Huguenot minority in France had become, at the close of the conferences of Poissy, effective enough to defy the laws which had been made against them, and to exact an amendment of the laws which had been made in their favour. They took possession of many of the churches of the Catholics, destroyed the relics, the images, and the crucifixes with which they were embellished; and demanded an enlargement of the privileges which had been granted to themselves by the edict of the Duke of Guise, of July, 1561. For, while that edict tolerated their private meetings, it forbade their public assemblies; and

such a prohibition the Calvinists would no longer obey in practice, nor patiently endure in principle. The demand was successful. L'Hôpital, the ever zealous patron of religious liberty, proposed to an assembly of the Notables the enactment of a new law, which authorised the public celebration of the reformed worship on the easy conditions, that it did not take place within the walls of any fortified city—that the worshippers did not assemble in arms—and that they permitted the attendance of any officer of the Crown who might require to be present. On the other hand, it was provided that the Huguenots should restore the churches which they had usurped, and that they should not give scandal to the Catholics by breaking their images or crucifixes, or by any similar outrage. This law was called the Edict of January, 1562. It was willingly registered by the parliaments in the South and West of France, and peremptorily rejected by the Parliament of Dijon. The Parliament of Paris at first refused to accept it, and accepted it at last, only in obedience to repeated and positive commands from the king, and not even then without a protest that they did so in submission to necessity,—without approving the new opinions,—and awaiting the time when it might be possible to make other and better arrangements on the subject. By the Huguenots themselves, the Edict of January, 1562, was received with gratitude, or rather with exultation. Except that they were still excluded from public preaching within the fortifications of walled towns, they had at length, by many grievous sufferings, acquired whatever was necessary to the freedom of their worship, and to the diffusion of their doctrines. For such a victory they rightly judged that the lives of their martyred brethren had not been an excessive price.

Nothing, however, was more remote from the designs of the Triumvirate, than that they should enjoy that victory in peace. Calling to their aid Philip II. and the Papal



legate, they now assailed the Huguenots on the most vulnerable point of their defences. It was their calamity to have been acting under the ostensible guidance and protection of Anthony of Navarre; and to detach him from their cause, weak and frivolous as he was, would be to transfer to the side of their enemies all the extensive powers with which that prince was invested, as Lieutenant General of the kingdom. To accomplish his conversion to the faith of Rome, it was requisite to appeal, neither to his understanding nor to his conscience, but simply to his egregious and well-known vanity. For this purpose the highest dignitaries of Europe condescended to become parties to one of those farces in real life, which the French call mystifications. Anthony's dominant idea, and day-dream, was that of an exchange of his nominal sovereignty of Navarre for a real crown and real subjects. The Pope, therefore, tempted him with proposals for a divorce from Jane d'Albret, his wife, on the ground of her notorious heresy, that so he might be free to marry Mary, Queen of Scots, and in her right to reign over Scotland. Philip II. offered him the choice of a new kingdom, in Africa or Sardinia, or the restitution of Navarre itself. One easy but indispensable condition only must be first performed. He must embrace the faith and communion of the Holy See; and that this embarrassing measure might be reconciled to his royal honour, it was proposed that a conference of Huguenot and Catholic Doctors should be holden in his presence, when he might gracefully, and with dignity, surrender himself to the convictions which would naturally follow on the argumentative triumph of the advocates of the religion of his forefathers. Every act of this projected comedy was exactly performed, and the head of the House of Bourbon, the father of Henry IV. of France, gave to his son the example of purchasing a crown by the public abandonment of the faith of his early and of his mature life. The difference was, that the

glittering prize actually rested on the brows of the son, while it only mocked the eager grasp of the father.

The secession of Anthony of Navarre gave to the Triumvirate a feeble ally indeed, but a great accession of power. It placed at their disposal the armies which obeyed him as Lieutenant General of France; and it disquieted their antagonists, by teaching them how precarious was the trust they habitually reposed in princes. In all the presumptuous confidence inspired by these new resources, the Princes of Lorraine now bound themselves by a traitorous treaty with Philip II. to concur in the introduction into France, and in the employment there, of the forces of Spain, for the extermination of heresy. To this compact, Anthony gave his sanction, and, in furtherance of it, he requested the Duke of Guise to join him in a meditated attack on the Huguenots in Paris.

On his way through Champagne for this purpose, the Duke, passing near Vassy, heard the ringing of the church bells of that little town; and, on inquiring about the cause, was answered that they were rung to call together the Huguenots to their religious exercises. "They shall soon," exclaimed the Duke, "Huguenotise (*Huguenoteront*) in a very different manner." Then riding up to the place of meeting, followed by about 300 of his retainers, he fell on the unarmed congregation, killing three, and wounding others, of them. The Huguenots defended themselves with the stones lying on the ground before them; with one of which the Duke himself received a blow. In the indignation of the moment, he gave to his followers commands which they too well obeyed. At his bidding, and in his presence, they slew 60, and wounded 200, of the defenceless assembly. There was but little booty to be gained from such a foe; but a volume was found which, till then, the Duke had never seen. "Look," he exclaimed to his brother, the Cardinal of Lorraine, who had sheltered himself, during the slaughter, beneath

an adjacent wall, "look, here is one of the books of these Huguenots." "There is no harm in this book," answered the Cardinal; "it is the Bible." "The Bible," replied the learned adversary of the new faith; "how can that be? You see it is not a year since this book was published, and they say that the Bible was published more than 1500 years ago."

The massacre at Vassy was a direct infringement of the Edict of January, 1562. It was a defiance of all law, by one of the chief nobles of France. It was an outrage so intolerable, and so full of menace, that if it should pass unpunished, there was an end to every hope of safety or of peace. Condé solemnly denounced the author of it to the Queen-mother as a murderer, a conspirator, and a traitor. Beza appealed to her for protection, and his flock invoked the aid of the governor of Paris — the Constable Montmorency. Catherine listened with terror, and answered with equivocations; while, with all the zeal of a renegade, Anthony of Navarre defended the conduct of the Duke, and apologised for the massacre. "Remember, sire," prophetically answered Beza, "that the Church is an anvil on which many a hammer has been broken."

Guise, however, was now irrevocably committed to a deadly strife with that invincible antagonist. Entering Paris amidst the acclamations of the fanatical multitude, who hailed him as a new Judas Maccabæus, he seized Catherine and Charles, and kept them in a strict though gentle captivity, first at Fontainebleau, and afterwards at Melun and Vincennes. The triumph of the Triumvirate and of their domestic and foreign allies was shortlived. It was a triumph promptly and fearfully expiated. With the massacre of Vassy and the seizure of the king, commenced the wars of religion; of all the dark tragedies which have been enacted in France, the darkest and the most disastrous. Agrippa d'Aubigné, a contemporary

historian, in his review of these events, recapitulates, in the following indignant terms, the vindication of the Huguenots for plunging their country and themselves into those dismal hostilities. "So long," he says, "as the adherents of the new religion were destroyed merely under the forms of law, they submitted themselves to the slaughter, and never raised a hand in their own defence against those injuries, cruel and iniquitous as they were. But when the public authorities and the magistracy, divesting themselves of the venerable aspect of justice, put daggers into the hands of the people, abandoning every man to the violence of his neighbours; and when public massacres were perpetrated to the sound of the drum and of the trumpet, who could forbid the unhappy sufferers to oppose hand to hand, and sword to sword, and to catch the contagion of a righteous fury, from a fury unrestrained by any sense of justice?"

If, as is but too probable, I shall appear to have been seduced by the preceding narrative from the problem which I proposed to myself at the commencement of this lecture, I can, for the present, only answer that it appears to me an indispensable preliminary to the solution of that problem. I do not think it possible to explain, intelligibly, why the protest made by so large a part of the people of France against the tyranny and the errors of the Roman Church, was not followed by any effectual resistance to the despotism of the reigning French dynasty, without first indicating what was the nature and what the principal stages of that great controversy. I hope to resume and to close that inquiry in my next succeeding lecture.

## LECTURE XVII.

## ON THE REFORMATION AND THE WARS OF RELIGION.

THE inquiry into the causes which rendered the Reformation incapable of securing the constitutional liberty of the French people has conducted me to the commencement of the wars of religion. The history of those wars yet remains to be written. If, indeed, you turn to the Abbé Anquetil's *Esprit de la Ligue*, you will find there a catalogue of writers who have contemplated those events in almost every conceivable point of view, and under the bias of every conceivable prepossession. But they have never yet been the subject of any comprehensive narrative informed by the research, and illuminated by the philosophy, which characterise the great historical authors of the present age. M. Mignet's promised work, the fruit of twenty-five laborious years, will, I trust, ere long supply that deficiency.

The historian of the wars of religion, whenever he shall appear, may perhaps consider them as comprising three distinct periods, each of which has an aspect, and a hero, peculiar to itself. The first would embrace the ten years

which elapsed between the seizure of Orleans by Condé, in 1562, and the massacre of St. Bartholomew, in 1572—years memorable for the too successful treacheries of Catherine de Medici. The second period, commencing from that fearful tragedy, and terminating with the assassination of Henry III. in August, 1589, would exhibit the triumph and the fall of the great commander of the League, Henry, the second Duke of Guise. The third period would be that of the gallant struggle of Henry IV. against the Leaguers and their foreign allies, and would conclude with his purchase of the Crown of France by the abandonment of the faith to the defence of which his life had been so solemnly consecrated, both by his mother and by himself. On each of these epochs I have a few observations to offer.

First, then, the supposition that Catherine was a deliberate infidel, who had firmly rejected every religious creed, is supported by no proof, and is opposed to all probabilities. Fanaticism is the only disease of the human mind which could have so utterly extinguished in her bosom all the sympathies of the human heart. She must be supposed to have transcended all the known limits of the wickedness of our fallen race, if, during long years, she really meditated the crimes which signalise her name, without at the same time invoking the narcotic aid of some plausible sophistry. Doubtless she believed (for how common has ever been the belief?) that she was doing an acceptable service to God by the destruction of those whom she regarded as his enemies. Doubtless the habitual profligacy of her life and manners was not really incompatible (for how often has such guilt been reconciled?) with an earnest desire to propitiate the Divine favour. She was at once a cruel, ambitious, dissolute woman, and a zealous Catholic.

Nothing, therefore, could be more grateful to her than the events of the first war, or campaign, which was closed

by the Treaty of Amboise. In the eleven months over which it had extended, both the Catholic and the Huguenot rivals of her power had been overthrown. Guise had fallen at the siege of Orleans, by the hand of Poltrôt; Anthony, king of Navarre, had been slain before the walls of Rouen; and, on the field of Dreux, St. André had lost his life. Montmorency had been captured by the troops of Condé, and Condé himself had been made a prisoner of war by the troops of Montmorency. When false tidings from the battle announced to her that the Calvinists had conquered, she calmly answered, "Well, then, we must say our prayers in French." When better intelligence assured her of the triumph of the Catholics, she still dressed her countenance in smiles, though with a more serious purpose.

Condé was in her power. In common with the whole race of Bourbon, he was the slave of disorderly passions; and, of that servitude, the Queen-mother too well knew how to avail herself. He had relished the society of his Calvinistic brethren in arms very much as our Charles the Second had enjoyed that of the Covenanters in Scotland; and now, spells were laid on him by the Armida of the French court, resembling those which, in a later age, were woven by the same court for that voluptuous member of the family of Stuart. She amused the captivity of Condé by splendid fêtes; she threw in his way temptations to more guilty pleasures; and she fired his ambition with the promise of succeeding to the office of Lieutenant General of the kingdom, which the death of the King of Navarre had vacated. Such allurements proved irresistible. Regardless of the remonstrances of many of the captains, and of all the ministers of the Huguenot armies, Condé, as the head of their party, and in exercise of the general powers with which they had invested him, signed the Treaty of Amboise. It gave to the Reformers a precarious peace, but it deprived them of the right which they

held, under the Edict of January, 1562, of worshipping in public everywhere beyond the walls of fortified cities. Thenceforward they were to meet together for that purpose only in a single place within every bailliage of France which was inhabited by Protestant nobles and their retainers.

Condé awaited in vain the promised wages of his infidelity. To have raised him to the office of Lieutenant General of France would have been to elevate him to a power not inferior to that of the Regent of the kingdom herself, and Catherine would hazard no such competition. She, therefore, caused the majority of Charles IX. to be announced in his 14th year; and a King reigning in his own right could not, of course (as it was urged), divide his authority, either with a Regent, or with a Lieutenant. Palpable as was the duplicity of such an evasion of her promises, Condé could not even yet escape the fascinations which the Queen-mother so well knew how to exercise over him. Gratified by other and less costly honours, he still took his place among the royal courtiers, and consented to preside at a meeting of the royal council, for the promulgation of an edict which abridged even the narrow concessions on the subject of public worship, which his own Treaty of Amboise had made in favour of the Huguenots. After such an acquiescence Condé had ceased to be formidable: and he silently witnessed the departure of Catherine and her son on a royal progress, in which she meditated yet further encroachments on the hardly earned privileges of the reformed pastors and their flocks.

At Roussillon, accordingly, the name and the authority of Charles were employed for that purpose; and an edict of the 4th August, 1564, which took its title from that place, restrained the hitherto unlimited freedom of the worship of the Calvinists in private houses. Theirs was, at this time, the only power in the state which balanced that of the sovereigns; and both the ambition and the



bigotry of Catherine demanded the absolute subjugation of all such competitors. To insure it, she advanced with her son as far as Bayonne, where, as the representative of Philip II., the Duke of Alva awaited them; and with him she held long and secret consultations, the still extant records of which point, though darkly and dubiously, at the horrible catastrophe of St. Bartholomew. Whether the design was really then projected or not, it is, at least, certain, that astrology never scared mankind with a more sinister conjunction than that which thus, for the first and last time, brought into the presence of each other, the three deadly persecutors of those times, — Italian, French, and Spanish.

The terrors inspired by that ill-omened meeting, and the resentment kindled by the successive violations of the Treaty of Amboise, stimulated the Huguenots to take up again the arms which, in submission to that treaty, they had reluctantly laid down. They addressed remonstrances, both to Condé and to Catherine. To him they complained of his desertion of their interests. Of her they demanded the exact fulfilment of the terms of pacification. It was a demand to be evaded only by the weapons which never failed her, — by falsehood and by guile. "The time," she said, "had now arrived (I quote, not the words, but the substance of her answer), when, laying aside their dissensions with each other, Frenchmen should all unite in guarding the independence of their native land. Alva was marching along the eastern frontiers of France with an army which, though avowedly destined to repress the seditious Flemings, might turn aside to invade the dominions of the House of Valois. All faithful subjects of that house should, therefore, arm to avert such danger and disgrace from the noble kingdom of which all were the common children." Such appeals were never made in vain to Frenchmen. The Huguenots offered to raise and arm, at their own expense, several regiments for the

patriotic service. Coligny advised a direct breach with Philip, and the reunion to the Crown of France of its ancient fief of Flanders. The Queen-mother applauded their public spirit, but courteously declined their advice. "Without imposing on the adherents of the new religion any such heavy burden, she could herself (she said) levy and equip the forces demanded by the occasion." Such forces were, accordingly, summoned, and they thronged round the royal banner with all the alacrity of that warlike people. It was a controversial age; and yet no religious differences disturbed the ranks of these zealous combatants — for no Huguenots had been admitted into them! While they believed that Catherine was arming against Spain, she had been bringing together an army of Catholics to act against themselves. Laying aside her mask, she hailed Alva as a deliverer, succoured him as an ally, and prepared to enforce, by his assistance, a new edict for the entire suppression of the ritual and the faith of the Reformers.

The imminent danger roused them from their credulous reliance on the faithless Italian. Condé, awaking from his torpor, attempted, at the head of a hasty assemblage of his ancient followers, to seize the persons of the Queen-mother and her son at Monceaux, and after pursuing them in their flight to Paris, found himself, on the 10th November, 1567, in the presence of the royal forces, under the command of the Constable Montmorency, on the great plain of St. Denys. In the sanguinary battle which followed the Catholics triumphed, but their leader fell; events, for each of which Catherine expressed an equal gratitude. Her dominion could no longer be disputed by any rival, for the constable had been the last survivor of the Triumvirate; nor could it henceforward be menaced by any religious faction, for the strength of the Huguenots, as she willingly believed, was for ever broken.

A few weeks revealed to her the vanity of this exulta-

tion. The force of the vanquished Reformers seemed to thrive upon defeat. Retreating towards the Meuse, the remnant of their shattered bands effected a junction with the German levies, which had marched to their support under the command of John Casimir, the son of the Elector Palatine ; and, from one extremity of France to the other, the civil war again raged, but with redoubled fury. In turning over the dark records of that merciless age, the eye is painfully arrested by one most unwelcome incident. We may neither deny nor conceal the fact that, in the city of Nismes, the Huguenots slaughtered, in cold blood, 120 Catholics, of whom no less than 72 were defenceless prisoners. It was, indeed, the act of a savage populace, against which their ministers and commanders expostulated in vain ; but, after such an act, we cannot denounce the massacre of St. Bartholomew as a crime altogether without provocation, or without example.

It was, however, a crime which might, perhaps, have now been averted by the capture of Paris itself, if Condé, who had once more approached and straitened the city, had not once more also been the victim of Italian intrigue. With the courage which never failed her, Catherine herself appeared in his camp ; there to verify the customary boast, that her tongue and her pen were more than a match for the lances of her enemies. Never had that tongue been more profuse of blandishments, or more successful. "She came, the messenger of peace, to heal the wounds of their bleeding country. For that end, what sacrifice, she asked, could be excessive ? An amnesty for all the past offences, an unconditional acquiescence in all their present demands, were the only terms she could propose to the loyal, though misguided, subjects of her son ; and guilty, indeed, (she argued), would be the ambition which should induce their chiefs to incur the responsibility of rejecting such proposals, and of protracting such a war." It no longer rested with those chiefs to refuse or to accept them. At the

voice of the syren, their followers rapidly disbanded ; and on the 20th March, 1568, the mere letter of her promises was fulfilled by the signature of a new act of pacification. From the place at which it was signed, it was called the Treaty of Longjumeau ; but, from the jesters of the times, it received the more appropriate name of the *traité boiteux et mal assise* — one of the negotiators having been lame, and the other having borne the name of Malassise. Mèzerai dismisses it with the more serious remark, that it left the Huguenots to the mercy of their enemies, with no better guarantee than the word of an Italian woman.

But though the Treaty of Longjumeau added nothing to the real security of the Reformers, it effectually accomplished the real purpose of the Queen-mother. It raised the threatened blockade and siege of Paris, and it dispersed the too credulous Calvinists and their commanders. But it neither crushed nor dispirited them. To Condé and to Coligny, and to their followers, La Rochelle afforded an impregnable defence, and there they negotiated with Elizabeth for supplies both of forces and of money.

The time had, however, now arrived, when by one vigorous effort, Catherine might not unreasonably hope to bring these protracted hostilities to a close. Weakened by their own precipitate disbandment, and abandoned by their German auxiliaries, the Huguenots could no longer contend on equal terms with the royal armies, supported as they were by the zealous co-operation both of the Spanish and the Papal Crowns. The Queen-mother, on the other hand, relieved by the death of the aged Montmorency from the incumbrance of his unskilful command, might now kindle the flame of French chivalry, and gratify her own feelings, by placing the conduct of the war in the hands of the Duke of Anjou, her third and favourite son, then a youth in his eighteenth year ; while to avert the dangers of his inexperience, Strozzi, an officer of some celebrity as the leader of Italian Condottieri, might be

appointed to superintend and guide his operations in the field.

The campaign of 1569 was opened with these hopes, and, ere long, the justice of them was triumphantly vindicated. On the 16th of March of that year, Condé fell in the battle of Jarnac, after witnessing the defeat of the forces under his orders. The body of the prince was treated with base indignities by Anjou. The conduct of the Protestant cause passed as a melancholy, and, as it seemed, an undisputed inheritance to Coligny; when another, and still more celebrated, member of the House of Bourbon appeared as his successful competitor.

At the town of Saintes, then the head-quarters of the Huguenots, Jane d'Albret presented herself, leading by either hand a boy, each of whom she came to devote to the sacred cause in which Condé had just fallen. One of those youths was his own son, and was now the heir of his title. The other, Henry of Béarn, was the son of Jane herself, and of her deceased husband, Antoine, King of Navarre. Though Henry had not yet completed his fifteenth year, the Calvinistic troops hailed him with acclamations as their general-in-chief and as the protector of their churches. The gallant boy welcomed the perilous commission, and answered by an oath to persevere in the struggle for religious liberty, until either death or victory should have brought the contest to a close.

Victory, however, was long to be wooed in vain by Henry of Navarre. Within a few weeks from his solemn vow and self-dedication, the hostile armies met on the field of Montcontour. Of all the combats of the Huguenots it was the most disastrous. Not more than 8000 of them escaped, leaving behind them more than twice that number of their comrades, either killed or prisoners, and carrying with them Coligny himself, covered with wounds and overwhelmed with sorrow. D'Andelot, his brother, was amongst the slain. A reward of 50,000 crowns was

offered for his own head. His house was burnt, his estates pillaged, the wreck of his forces were in mutiny, and a large number of his friends had both abandoned and reproached him. In the midst of these troubles, and within a fortnight from the loss of the battle, he raised himself from his sick bed to write the following letter to his children:—"We will not (he said to them) repose our hopes on any of those things in which the world confides, but will seek for something better than our eyes can see, or our hands can handle. We will follow in the steps of Christ our commander. Man, it is true, has deprived us of all that man can take away, and, as such is the good pleasure of God, we will be satisfied and happy. Our consolation is, that we have not provoked these injuries by doing any wrong to those who have injured us, but that I have drawn upon me their hatred by having been employed by God for the defence and assistance of His Church. I will, therefore, add nothing more except that, in His name I admonish and adjure you to persevere undauntedly in your studies, and in the practice of every Christian virtue."

While Coligny was drawing these lessons of parental wisdom from his defeat, it was celebrated with rapturous exultation at Paris and Madrid, and with *Te Deums* at Rome. But scarcely had those triumphant strains died away, before the indomitable Huguenot was approaching the gates of Paris at the head of an army still more numerous, and better appointed, than that which had been overthrown at Montcontour. At the tidings of that disaster, the mountaineers of the south and east of France, and the auxiliaries of Germany, had crowded to his standard, and the commander who, but a few months before, had witnessed the annihilation of his army, was now preparing the blockade of his enemies in their capital. Against such undying energy, Catherine could contend no longer; and, on the 8th of August, 1570, she assented

to the Treaty of St. Germain, which not only restored to the Huguenots the freedom of public worship, but placed in their keeping four cities (in the immediate vicinity of their resources and allies) to serve as a guarantee for their peaceable enjoyment of their new privileges.

Within two years and sixteen days from the Treaty of St. Germain, Coligny himself was assassinated, and the streets of Paris were deformed by the slaughtered bodies of the victims of the day of St. Bartholomew. If we rely on Davila, that treaty was signed by Catherine as a means of alluring the heretics into her toils, and of devoting them to the extermination which he says had been so often meditated, and so often postponed. But Davila is the constant dupe of his own subtlety, and of his belief that the avowed and the real motives of Princes can never be the same. The hypothesis that the massacre was the result of so protracted a series of artifices, is certainly gratuitous, and is, I think, incredible.

In August, 1750, Catherine had many motives for a sincere reconciliation with the Huguenots. They had proved themselves invincible, and yet there was no longer any reason to dread that they would be victorious. They had invariably been defeated in the field. Their numbers had diminished, and were still diminishing. Except to the south of the Loire, they were everywhere in a decided minority. Even there they were chiefly composed of the territorial lords and their rural retainers. The civic populations of France were almost exclusively Catholic. Paris was their intrenched camp, their arsenal, and their treasury.

But over Paris and in the other great cities of the kingdom, the House of Guise was rapidly regaining the influence which had raised them, in the reign of Francis II., to a dominion resembling that of the ancient mayors of the palace. Unless she could balance that power, Catherine had but little security for retaining her own,

and an alliance with Coligny and his followers promised her that advantage with but little apparent hazard.

Charles himself was the heir of the ambition of his grandfather, Francis I. To gratify it he had but to anticipate the policy of Richelieu, by placing himself at the head of the Protestant against the Austrian powers of Europe. In that position he might regain for his crown the ancient French fief of Flanders; the whole population of which, in revolt against Philip II., were passionately invoking his aid, and proffering to him their allegiance. But to that end the zealous support of his Protestant subjects was indispensable.

With such motives for fair dealing, why suppose Charles and his mother to have been treacherous? Or if we imagine that truth could never find harbour in her bosom, even when it would best promote her selfish purposes, how shall we explain the events which actually followed the treaty of St. Germain's? It is not a conjecture, but a fact beyond all dispute, that Coligny urged on Charles the policy of acquiring Flanders by a declaration of war against Philip, and that Charles listened to that advice with his characteristic eagerness. Active diplomatic communications followed with the Protestant princes of Germany. A secret convention pledged the French king to supply succours to Louis of Nassau. Privateers were fitted out at La Rochelle against the fleets of Spain. Ships of war were stationed off the coast of Brittany, to intercept the succours destined for the relief of Alva, and an army was sent to the north of France with the same apparent object. A new edict was made to prevent the interference of the Catholics with the education of the children of Protestants. Coligny was indemnified for all his losses in the war. Marguerite, the sister of Charles, was given in marriage to Henry of Navarre; and Charles himself, rejecting the offered hand of the daughter of Philip, wedded a German princess. To ascribe all these



acts not to the obvious motive of gratifying the ambition of a young and high-spirited prince, but to the desire of blinding the eyes of the Huguenots to the fate impending over them, is an error into which no one will fall who has had to do with public affairs, not merely as a commentator, but as an agent in them; for, to every such man, how often and how clearly has the secret been revealed, that the world is governed by improvisations and by improvisatori, not by prescient calculations, nor by far-sighted diviners of futurity?

Doubtless, however, the massacre of St. Bartholomew was a crime committed by Catherine, and her sons and her councillors, deliberately and with premeditation. Nor is it difficult, at least, to conjecture why or when the tide of her favour towards her new Protestant allies first became reflux. When, in the spring of 1572, the approaching marriage of Henry of Navarre and Marguerite had filled Paris with the adherents of both religions, the agents of Philip drew the attention of the Queen-mother to a danger to which she seems to have till then been insensible. They informed her that, in the secret deliberations about the affairs of the Netherlands, to which Coligny had been admitted by Charles, he had counselled the young king to emancipate himself from the thralldom in which she held him, and that measures were in progress for removing her from any further participation in the government of France. They bade her observe how universal was the enthusiasm of the capital in favour of the ancient faith and ritual; and how rancorous the antipathy with which the citizens regarded the innovators on it. They pointed out to her how her own and her son's attachment to the person of Coligny, and, as it was suspected, to his cause, was rapidly destroying their popularity, and elevating the Princes of Lorraine to a power which would soon become too formidable for restraint; and they appear to have succeeded in convincing

her, that the only condition on which she could prolong her reign in France was that of employing the House of Guise and the Catholics as her agents to crush the Huguenots, that so she might at once predominate, and triumph over both. The documents of that time (so far as I have any acquaintance with them) seem to me to trace with sufficient clearness to such considerations as these, the departure of Catherine, in August 1572, from the policy which, in August 1570, had dictated the Treaty of St. Germain. Although the methods taken at last to assemble the whole Huguenot aristocracy at Paris, and so bring them within her power, may indicate that she cherished an insidious design against them during some weeks before the actual perpetration of the massacre, we need not suppose it to have been preceded by a deliberate hypocrisy, maintained during two whole years of avowed and seeming friendship.

It is for the credit of us all not to exaggerate the darkness of a crime which has left so foul and indelible a disgrace upon our common nature. For horrible as was the act itself, the subsequent celebration of it was even yet more revolting. Pope Gregory XIII. and his cardinals went in procession to the church of St. Mark, not to deprecate in sackcloth and ashes the divine vengeance on a guilty people, but "to render solemn thanksgivings to God, the infinitely great and good (such is the contemporary record) for the great mercy which he had vouchsafed to the see of Rome and to the whole Christian world." A picture of the massacre was added to the embellishments of the Vatican, and by the pontiff's order a golden medal was struck, to commemorate to all ages the triumph of the Church over her enemies. The Pope found meet companions of his joy among the players. In all the cities of France they frequently exhibited a tragedy called the death of Coligny, in which he and his brother D'Andelôt were represented enduring the fearful torments,

and cherishing the malignant passions, with which the imagination of Dante has arrayed the place of future punishment.

Burdened as the heart is with the remembrance that the princes who executed this butchery, that the priests who thanked God for it in their masses, that the mimes who chuckled over it in their ribaldry, and that the crowds who night after night applauded them, were all our brethren, reflecting to us in their actual guilt our own possible criminality, I know not whether the apology which some recent French historians have offered for these offences of their ancestors be not even yet more offensive. It is, they tell us, a mere prejudice to blame any one. Man is but the creature of the age in which he lives. He is borne onwards by the irresistible current of events, the sport of a fatality with which it is not given him to contend, the helpless victim of those passions which infect and agitate the social system of which he happens to be a member. This doctrine, which, as I formerly observed, so many of the great historians of France have brought to light to shelter the atrocities which they have had to record, has been adopted by meaner, though not unpopular, hands to reconcile us to those of St. Bartholomew. It is sufficient to answer, if indeed to such profane extravagance any answer be due, that if fate compelled Catherine and her sons and their subjects to commit such offences, and constrained Pope Gregory XIII. and his cardinals to celebrate them with festive adorations, the same inexorable fate imposes upon us the necessity of holding their deeds and their memories in everlasting abhorrence. I repeat that the invocation of this stern deity from the Homeric Hades can never shed any real light over the ways of this upper world. Instead of affording a real or a plausible solution of the mysteries which surround us, it does at best but incumber the attempt to resolve them by the interposition of an unmeaning word. It is one of

those many refuges of lies, the real purpose of which is to dethrone the Creator from the moral government of his creation.

With the massacre of St. Bartholomèw closes the first of the three periods of the wars of religion. The era of treacheries was now to give place to the era of conspiracies, — the dominion of Catherine to the supremacy of Henry, Duke of Guise. France may be considered as having, henceforward, resolved itself into four encampments, sometimes warring, sometimes intriguing with each other; but each maintaining a separate policy, and aiming at distinct objects.

First. The Huguenots, acknowledging, as their joint chiefs, Henry of Navarre and his cousin, the younger Condé, were composed of two dissimilar sections, — the Consistoriaux and the Gentilshommes. The Consistoriaux comprised nearly all the Calvinistic ministers and their disciples of low degree. They had associated themselves together with the single object of vindicating their freedom of private conscience and public worship. They took up arms, even for that purpose, slowly and with reluctance; but they were not less reluctant to lay them down again until it had been accomplished. The Gentilshommes, on the other hand, were men of rank and fortune, with whom *Huguenoterie* was a family religion, a party watch-word, or a point of honour, but was seldom able to triumph over their selfish interests, or personal ambition.

Secondly. The Politiques had, originally, been combined together as a party by the Chancellor l'Hôpital; and, after his disappearance from the world, they regarded as their chief Damville, the governor of Languedoc, the second of the three sons of the Constable Montmorency. The Politiques all professed the religion of Rome, but were desirous, by mutual toleration, to unite all Frenchmen to each other, and to engage them all in resistance to the Papal despotism. They numbered, in their ranks, the governors of several

provinces, a large part of the magistracy, and some ministers of the royal council, who abhorred the carnage of St. Bartholomew, and were indignant at the degradation into which the Court of France had fallen.

Thirdly. The Catholic League was a union, under the presidency of Henry, Duke of Guise, of many local societies, which had been formed in some of the chief cities of France, for the defence of the ancient faith. But the purposes of these associations, when thus combined together, acquired a precision and an audacity unknown to the designs of any of those separate bodies. The credit, or responsibility, of having thus matured so many different projects into one great and consistent conspiracy, belongs to David, an advocate, who, in the year 1576, proposed to Pope Gregory XIII. a plan, which that pontiff ultimately sanctioned, and promised to reconcile to the consciences of the people of France. It was nothing less than the deposition of the House of Valois in favour of the House of Guise, on condition of their engaging to annul all edicts of toleration, — to exterminate all forms of heresy, — to accept the decrees of the Council of Trent, — to acknowledge their own spiritual allegiance to the Papacy, — and to obtain, from the States General of France, a similar acknowledgment. Even in the commission of such a treason, the advocate could not renounce his professional solicitude to be fortified by legal arguments; and David, therefore, conducted Gregory to the desired conclusion, by the following chain of reasoning : —

First ; Pepin, he said, had acquired the Crown of France from the donation of Pope Zachary. Secondly ; together with that temporal right, Zachary had conferred upon Pepin an apostolical benediction. Thirdly ; Hugues Capet had, six hundred years before, usurped the secular sovereignty which his descendants still retained ; but neither he nor they had inherited, or could usurp, the apostolical benediction which was indispensable to the spiritual

character of every legitimate dynasty. Fourthly; the right of the successors of St. Peter to confer that benediction, and with it that spiritual character and legitimate power, was indefeasible and imprescriptible. Fifthly; it was their duty to confer it on the most worthy. Sixthly; the superiority of desert plainly belonged to Henry, Duke of Guise; and, finally, if Gregory would bestow on him the apostolical benediction and with it the spiritual title to the French Crown, the mere temporal right must follow as a comparatively unimportant but inseparable accessory.

Of David's biography I know nothing, but it seems impossible that so astute a lawyer should have missed of distinction in the Palais de Justice. His esoteric doctrines as to the rights of the House of Guise, were long reserved for those who were initiated into the higher mysteries of the League. His exoteric teaching was propagated in the form of an act of association, through almost every province, city, and hamlet of France. Many different forms of it, indeed, seem to have been in use, but in each of them the subscribers bound themselves by three distinct pledges,—the first, to assist all the other members of the confederacy,—the second, to render an absolute obedience to its chief,—and the third, to devote everything, life itself included, to the extermination of the heretics, and to the exclusion from France of every religion other than that of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman See.

There was no age, or sex, or profession, or trade, or rank in France which did not contribute many members to this Holy League. But foremost in zeal were the Clergy. The bishop and chapter of every cathedral, the abbot and monks of every monastery, the brethren of every religious order, and the incumbents of every parish church, were organised into a compact spiritual militia, with garrisons in every city, and detachments in every village of the kingdom, ever ready to animate the zealous and to rebuke the languid in the same sacred cause, and

to cheer, with assurances of present pardon and future peace, every one who hazarded his life in defence of it.

Second only to the Clerical, were the Civic, partisans of the League ; and, amongst all cities, Paris was pre-eminent for her devotedness. The ancient corporate institutions of the capital became the basis of the new political or religious organisation. The *prévôts* of the merchants in their respective districts became lieutenants of the League in each. Every guild resolved itself into a committee for promoting the success of that holy alliance. The *Dixaniers*, or officers of the town guard, were all placed at the head of companies, which might be convened at the first sound of the tocsin. The *Quarteniers*, or chiefs of the sixteen quarters of Paris, had each the command of a regiment of Leaguers ; and the *Sections*, to which, in a later age, the revolutionary leaders gave so fearful a celebrity, were called into action for the first time, not by them, but by the Leaguers of the 16th century.

Religious enthusiasm, though the most active, was not the single principle of their association. Their leaders were skilful to touch all the chords to which the plebeian mind habitually vibrates ; and they did not attempt the subversion of an ancient dynasty by the hands of the people without themselves cultivating the character and the arts of demagogues ; a character which no magnanimous man will ever assume, and arts which no honest man will ever practise. Although neither magnanimous nor honest, or rather because he was neither, Guise excelled all men in the power of winning the popular confidence, and of controlling the popular will. Gifted with illustrious hereditary rank, a noble presence, a frank and courteous bearing, invincible courage, sympathy, or the semblance of sympathy, with the suffering many against the prosperous few, and prodigal without stint in promises of reform, he was the favourite courtier of the multitudes who, from his lips, eagerly accepted their accustomed

tribute of lavish flattery addressed to themselves, and of bitter invective directed against their superiors. Proposing to become the Napoleon, he commenced by becoming the Mirabeau, of his generation. The League, therefore, under his orders, distributed manifestoes echoing all the grievances of the States General. It demanded, not merely an absolute unity of religion in France, but the abolition of taxes, the independence of the Parliaments, and triennial States General. It became a great Democratic Confederacy for the overthrow, not merely of the heresies of the Huguenots, but of many of the prerogatives of the royal house, and of many privileges of the seigniorial families.

And yet some of the noblest of those families contributed to increase both the power and the numbers of the confederates. By joining their ranks, the Dukes of Nevers, Mercœur, Aumâle, and Elbeuf, with a long list of inferior grandees, rose to military commands, to civic governments, and to offices of emolument. Nor were there wanting magistrates of eminent wisdom, nor even men of undisputed moral worth, to impart to the League the weight of their judicial authority, and of their personal virtues.

The most efficient allies, however, of Guise and his followers were the Pontiffs who, in that age, occupied the chair of St. Peter. That Gregory XIII., who had chanted eucharistic masses in honour of the darkest crime which stains the annals of Christendom, should have been the willing dupe of the sophisms of the advocate David is not surprising; but from his successor, Sixtus V., better things might not unreasonably have been expected, for he holds no mean rank among the magnanimous princes who, at no infrequent intervals, have worn the papal tiara. The amusing account of his life by Gregorio Leti, which most of us may have read either in Italian or in English, must be considered rather as a romance than as a history;



for the biographer of Sixtus lacked, either the diligence to study, or the capacity to appreciate, the elevation and the dignity of his hero. Though no canonised Thaumaturgist, Sixtus wrought architectural miracles, which to this hour astonish and delight every visitor of Rome, and is celebrated by Ranke as among the wisest of the legislators, and the most vigorous of the administrators, by whom the Ecclesiastical States have been governed. He was a celebrated preacher, a laborious scholar, and a liberal patron of literature; and the edition of the Holy Scriptures, which was printed during his reign at his own press, was throughout corrected by his own hand. He laboured at the internal reformation of the Church over which he presided; and the best attestation of his personal worth and piety is, that he enjoyed the affection and esteem of St. Charles of Borromeo. And yet, such is the power of our corrupt passions when engaged in any cause which is supposed to sanctify the indulgence of them, that Sixtus encouraged and applauded, and became responsible for, crimes which "might have wounded the conscience of a buccaneer."

In Philip II. of Spain the Leaguers had yet another associate, whose zeal for their cause burnt fiercely, though his attachment to their persons and to their political principles was but equivocal. In his letters, for the publication of which the world is indebted to M. Capefigue, he exhibits himself in a character for a resemblance to which all the preceding history of mankind may be retraced in vain, till we ascend to the morose and gloomy solitude of Tiberius at Capreæ. From his silent retreat at St. Lorenzo, Philip contemplated the outer world in a spirit in which the dark melancholy of Johanna, and the boundless ambition of Charles, his two immediate predecessors, were combined with the marble-hearted fanaticism and the austere devotion of St. Dominic, to the maintenance of whose institutes he and they had been devoted. En-

dowed with unrivalled wealth, and power, and talents, and constancy of purpose, he employed them all to establish the two cardinal principles by which, as he judged, this fair world and every province of it ought to be governed; the one, the absolute dominion of the See of Rome in all spiritual matters; the other, the absolute dominion of the Crown in all secular affairs. To use, or to assert, the right of private judgment, was treason against the Tiara. To refuse a passive and implicit obedience to the prince, was treason against the Diadem. To those ecclesiastical and temporal chiefs, and to them alone, it belonged to direct the conduct of mankind. To all other men it belonged only to submit themselves to that supreme guidance. The tide of mental and political freedom was rising on every side around him, and to their proud waves he opposed the stern and inflexible resistance of those maxims, boldly asserted in theory, and as boldly reduced to practice.

The democratic tendencies of the Holy League had, therefore, excited the jealousy of Philip, even while he aided with complacency the death struggles in which it was engaged with Protestantism. And thus it happened that, while lavish in promises to the confederates, he afforded them his actual support with wary and hesitating steps. His true design may clearly be traced in his correspondence. It was first, to unite the Leaguers and the King for the destruction of the Huguenots in France, and then, to enlist them both in his own more comprehensive project, of exterminating all the heretics in Europe, by a union of the Catholic powers acting under his own direction in the cabinet, and under the command of Alexander Farnese, and his other generals, in the field.

Far as the event fell short of his anticipations, they were not wholly unfulfilled. But his success was purchased at the expense of the imperishable hatred of his

own name, of the debasement of his descendants, and of the degradation which, from that age to our own, has overspread his once prosperous and formidable kingdom.

The fourth and last of the parties into which France was divided, was composed of the king, the queen-mother, and the adherents of their court. It is difficult to characterise this body without touching on topics on which it is irksome to dwell, and the particular mention of which might involve some impropriety. Charles IX. had died within a few months from the massacre of St. Bartholomew, and it seems more charitable with his enemies to believe, than with his partisans to deny, that his last hours were consumed in agonies of remorse. Henry III., his brother and successor, excited equal wonder by his superstition and his licentiousness. Sometimes he might be seen traversing the streets as a flagellant, with bare head and feet, and with shoulders which afforded the most unequivocal proofs that his whip had not fallen on them idly or in sport. At other times he would join a religious procession, accompanied by Sibillot his favourite fool, who parodied, in grotesque antics and irreverent songs, the ceremonial and the chants of that devout solemnity. The next hour would find him bestowing the most costly and extravagant favours on the youths by whom he was surrounded, or outraging not only the dignity of his crown, but the decorous gravity of manhood, by the exaggeration, in his own person, of their debauched manners and effeminate appearance; or even descending so low as to amuse them by assuming female attire, and representing before them equivocal female characters. And yet, among these lawless revellers (*Mignons* was the name they familiarly bore), were many who, with all the light-hearted gallantry of their native land, could dally with danger and with death on the field of battle; and two of them, the Dukes de Joyeuse and d'Epernon, rose to eminence both as military commanders and as statesmen.

Catherine, the queen-mother, though in the decline of life, retained all her ancient passion for power, for treachery, and for intrigue. But, adapting her machinations to the now diminished authority of the Crown, she won adherents to the royal cause by the same shameful arts in which the Princes of Midian were instructed by the Chaldean prophet. Followed by a train of maids of honour, than whom no ladies ever less merited that title, she used them as her too ready instruments of seducing those whom she could not otherwise subdue, not scrupling to spread such toils even for her own son-in-law, Henry, the brave, but too ductile and self-indulgent King of Navarre.

The history of France, during the second period of the wars of religion, is composed of the intrigues and conflicts by which these four parties, the Huguenots, the Politiques, the League, and the Court, endeavoured to deceive, to conciliate, or to conquer one another. The successive involutions of their policy are developed in the annals of their age, with a rapidity like that with which the scenes are shifted in a mimic theatre. At one time the Huguenots alone successfully resist the royal arms. Then, entering into a traitorous conspiracy with each other, the Huguenots and the Politiques establish a state within the state, and by their combined forces extort from the king an almost unconditional acquiescence in their joint demands. The next act of the drama finds the Crown and the Politiques allied against the Huguenots, and compelling them to surrender most of their recently acquired privileges. The League now appears on the crowded stage, constraining the Court to subscribe a compact with them, for the utter extirpation of heretics and of heresy from the land. The papal thunders are then heard in the distance, excommunicating "the bastard and detestable race of the Bourbons," and depriving them of the succession to the Crown of France, — an insult which Henry of Navarre answers by the destruction of the Catholic army at Coutras,

while Guise avenges that loss by overwhelming the Protestant army of German auxiliaries. Those events are followed by the barricades of Paris, the flight of the king to Chartres, his humiliations at that city, the second States General of Blois, and the assassination of Guise, by the command and in the presence of his sovereign. The Royalists, the Politiques, and the Huguenots, then forming a temporary alliance, assemble a vast army for the capture of Paris, and the annihilation of the League. But at that critical moment the knife of the monk Jaques Clement retaliates the murder of Guise by the assassination of his royal murderer, and changes the whole conduct and character of the war. In that age of terror, the deed excited but little abhorrence, though even that iron generation must have been appalled to hear that Pope Sixtus V., calling himself the vicar of Christ on earth, had, in the full consistory at Rome, hazarded the frightful avowal, that he regarded the self-devotion and martyrdom of Clement as admitting of no unequal comparison with the self-sacrifice which had been endured at Calvary.

The House of Valois was now extinct. Those bloody and deceitful men had not lived out half their days. Henry II. perished in the prime of life by the lance of Montgomery. His eldest son, Francis II., did not complete his nineteenth year. The unhappy Charles IX., his second son, had not reached the age of twenty-four when he died, in strange and fearful torments. At the same early period, the Duke d'Alençon, the fourth son of Henry, fell a victim to intemperance. Henry III., his only other son, was assassinated in his thirty-eighth year. Francis of Guise met the same fate, while in the full vigour of his manhood; and Henry of Guise had not accomplished his thirty-seventh year, when he, also, was struck down by the daggers of hired murderers. It was not without an intelligible and an awful purpose, that a retributive providence thus openly rebuked the persecutors

of their brethren: and yet the condemnation which impartial history must pronounce on all the later sovereigns of the House of Valois may, perhaps, be justly mitigated by the belief, that the madness of their predecessor, Charles VI., was, to some extent, hereditary in his race. It is a welcome escape from conclusions hardly otherwise to be avoided, but which the reverence due to our common humanity must make every one anxious to avoid.

The third and last period of the wars of religion belongs to the military, rather than to the civil, annals of France. It has been sung by the French Virgil, in the French *Æneid*; and they who have read the *Henriade* (if, indeed, any of us can honestly say that they ever did or could read it) would hardly endure a prosaic account of that merciless controversy. Despite all the enthusiasm of Voltaire, I must, however, doubt whether his *Æneas* was really a great captain; and I regard it as beyond all dispute, that his story, like that of his Trojan prototype, is rather disfigured than embellished by the *Didos* who occupy so conspicuous a place in it. But no wit or genius can ever rescue the real catastrophe of the French epic from shame, and regret, and indignation.

Henry IV. had been trained in the Calvinistic creed by his mother, Jane d'Albret. D'Aubigné, who knew her well, says of her, that, though perfectly feminine in every other respect, she possessed a masculine intrepidity of soul; that her capacity was equal to the most arduous duties, and her heart invincible by the greatest calamities. Her son was the heir of her courage and her understanding, but not of her devotion or her constancy. The early impressions of her maternal love and wisdom were, probably, never altogether obliterated from his mind, even by the habitual licentiousness both of his early, and of his mature, life. Yet such licence never was, and never can be, associated with the faith which prepares man, by self-conquest, to become the conqueror of the world. So far as any

real religious convictions can be ascribed to Henry, he seems to have been a Protestant to the last; but that no such convictions had a very firm hold on his mind, is the inference to be drawn from almost every passage of his life. When at last he preferred the abandonment of his creed to the loss of his crown, it may perhaps have appeared to himself, as it evidently did to his friends, that he was rather incurring an imputation on his honour as a gentleman, than inflicting a wound on his conscience as a Christian. To this day the apostasy is defended, and the dishonour denied, by many of his countrymen, on grounds against which a protest must be made by every one to whom truth and integrity are something better than empty words.

"Consider," it is said, "the consequences which hung on his decision. By adhering to the Reformed Church, he must have prolonged the most disastrous of all civil wars — he must have seen the dismemberment of France between the League and Philip II. — he must himself have been superseded in favour of the Duke of Mayenne, by the States General whom the Duke had convened at Paris — he must thus have abdicated the throne of the Bourbons to the House of Guise — and must have delivered up the Huguenots as defenceless victims to the bigotry of the Leaguers and their head. On the other hand, by returning to the bosom of the Church of Rome, Henry," proceed his apologists, "had the certainty, not only of escaping these dangers, but of restoring peace to his kingdom, of transmitting the Crown to his posterity, and of securing toleration to his ancient Protestant adherents. With what reason or humanity," they ask, "could he, in the prospect of such consequences, persist any longer in maintaining a religious creed, and observing an ecclesiastical ritual, to which, after all, he had never given more than a hesitating and thoughtless preference?"

To the question thus stated may first be opposed

another question, — What is the depth of criminality thus imputed to Henry IV. by those who represent him as conducting, during many successive years, the most deadly civil war recorded in the History of Christendom for the establishment of a religion to which neither his heart, nor his understanding, yielded any genuine allegiance? His accusers have never raised so heavy an accusation against him as is thus preferred by his apologists. The reverence due to the memory of so great a man, and all the probabilities of the case, require us to reject the hypothesis that he was an hypocrite, even when leading the Huguenots in the fields of Coutras and of Ivry. His real responsibility is, that of having acted on the belief that, by disavowing his faith, he would best promote the interests of his people, of his descendants, and of himself. His error was that of elevating the human above the Divine prescience, and of claiming for the foresight of man a higher authority than for the immutable laws of God. Doubtless it was not without some plausible sophistry that he reconciled to himself so wilful, and so solemn, a departure from the sacred obligations of truth. Doubtless he believed it to be, on the whole, expedient for others and for himself. But that it was really inexpedient we know, because we know that, by the Divine law, it was unequivocally forbidden.

What the future history of France would have been if Henry had clung to his integrity, is known only to the Omniscient; but, with the annals of France in our hands, we have no difficulty in perceiving that the day of his impious, because pretended, conversion was among the *dies nefasti* of his native country.

It restored peace, indeed, to that bleeding land, and it gave to himself an undisputed reign of seventeen years; but he found them years replete with cares and terrors, and disgraced by many shameful vices, and at last abruptly terminated by the dagger of an assassin. It



rescued France, indeed, from the evils of a disputed succession, but it consigned her to two centuries of despotism and misgovernment. It transmitted the Crown, indeed, to seven in succession of the posterity of Henry, but of them one died on the scaffold, three were deposed by insurrections of their subjects, one has left a name pursued by unmitigated and undying infamy, and another lived and died in a monastic melancholy, the feeble slave of his own minister. The grandson of Henry, Louis XIV., amidst the splendours which surrounded him, may appear to have been a brilliant exception from the dark fatality which waited on the other sovereigns of the House of Bourbon; but even he, by the licentiousness of his personal habits, by the arbitrary system of his government, by his wild extravagance, by his iniquitous wars, and by his remorseless persecutions, paved the downward path to the ruin of his name, of his dynasty, and of his race. If any prophetic voice could have disclosed to Henry the events really depending on his purchase of his Crown by apostasy, would that purchase have been made? If he had sought for guidance in the sacred book, which was the cornerstone of the faith he abandoned, would it not have reminded him, that "the lip of truth shall be established for ever, but that a lying tongue is but for a moment?"

It must not, however, be forgotten that one of the results of Henry's renunciation of the reformed faith was glorious to himself, and was, for a time, eminently advantageous to his people. It enabled him, in April 1598, to promulgate the Edict of Nantes—the great charter of Protestantism in France. It commenced by an acknowledgment that God was adored and worshipped by all the French people, if not in the same forms, yet with the same intentions; and it was then declared to be a perpetual and irrevocable law, the chief foundation of the union and tranquillity of the State—First, that all men should enjoy, in private, full liberty of conscience—Secondly,

that the free public celebration of the Protestant worship should, in all future times, be permitted in every place in which it had been actually celebrated, immediately before the date of that edict — Thirdly, that all superior lords might hold meetings for public worship within the precincts of their chateaux ; and that every inferior gentleman might receive as many as thirty visitors at his domestic worship — Fourthly, that the Protestants should participate in all the benefits of public employments, schools, hospitals, and charities — Fifthly, that they should possess five academies for the education of youth — Sixthly, that they might convene and hold national synods — and, Seventhly, that they should occupy several fortified cities, for securing to them the faithful observance of these concessions. That they were ill observed is indeed true, and that at length the grandson of Henry revoked his “perpetual and irrevocable” law, is also true. Yet, during eighty-seven years, it remained the measure and the rule, if not the effectual bulwark, of the rights of the Protestant population of France.

How then (to resume the question with which I commenced my last preceding lecture) did it happen, that the protest made by so large a part of that population, against the spiritual tyranny of the Roman Church, was not followed by any effectual resistance to the despotism of the Bourbon Dynasty ? The details with which I have hitherto detained you will now, I trust, enable me to bring into a narrow compass my answer to that inquiry.

That answer in general is, that the Reformation was unproductive of civil liberty in France, because the Reformed Church in that country was never able to attain to more than a temporary and precarious toleration. The more precise answer, in my judgment at least, is, that this ill success is to be attributed to the following causes : —

The Calvinistic type which Protestantism assumed in

France, was alien from the national character. While yet a novelty, indeed, it was also a fashion. To sing the hymns of Marot in the *Pré aux Clercs*, or to join the multitude which thronged the pulpit of Theodore Beza, was the *mode* in a country where that capricious power has ever erected the chief seat of her dominion. But, ere long, the national spirit reasserted its indefeasible authority. Turning away from the cold, unimpressive worship of Geneva, the great, the noble, and the rich, followed by the crowd which usually follows them, joined again in theatrical processions to the shrines of their patron saints, and knelt as before around the altars, where the dramatic solemnities of the mass were celebrated amidst clouds of incense, and strains of sacred harmony. In religion, as in everything else, the craving of the French mind for spectacle, for representation, and for effect, is, and ever has been, insatiable.

The Calvinistic system was distinguished from that of all the other reformed churches, by the extent to which it rejected ecclesiastical tradition, and erected the whole superstructure of belief and worship on the Holy Scriptures, as interpreted by Calvin himself. Not content to sever those bonds which, reaching back to the most remote Christian antiquity, should hold together the churches of every age in one indissoluble society, he imposed on his disciples, and on their spiritual progeny in all future times, other bonds, wrought by himself from his study of the Bible, and embracing the whole compass, not of theology alone, but of moral philosophy also. His Christian Institutes claimed and acquired for a season, in his Church, an empire resembling that which the logic and ethics of Aristotle had so long enjoyed in the schools. But Calvin was not an Aristotle. His vivacious, inquisitive, sceptical fellow-countrymen were not schoolmen. Ere many years had passed, they became impatient of the dogmatism even of their great patriarch himself. By

attempting to bring all moral science within the sphere of theology, and by converting scientific principles into articles of faith, he had exposed to the attacks of that ingenious and versatile people, a long line of positions, many of which, even when found to be defenceless, could not be abandoned with safety to the rest. The reaction which took place, hurried the insurgents from one extreme to the other. Servetus may be said to have at length obtained his revenge. The doctrines for which he died were widely diffused throughout the churches founded by the author of his death. For, in the history of Calvinism in France, we have the most impressive of all illustrations of the truth, that no Christian society can sever itself from the ancient, and once universal commonwealth of the Christian Church, except at the imminent risk of sacrificing the essence of Christianity to the spirit of independence. The Socinianism of the later Protestant Church of France was at once the proof of its inherent weakness, and the cause of its further decline.

The Reformation in France became comparatively barren of constitutional freedom, and of its other legitimate fruits, because the Reformed Church there soon and widely departed from its appropriate character, to assume the office of a party in the State. The alliance of the Huguenots with the Politiques was fatal at once to the religious discipline of the former, and to their personal sanctity. Their preachers foresaw the contaminating influence of that association, and earnestly, but vainly, dissuaded it. Thus the treaty of Milhau, of December 1573, between the Protestants and Politiques, was little, if at all, less than a deliberate treason. Thus, also, the still more intimate connection between the Consistoriaux and the Gentilshommes, in the ranks of the Huguenots themselves, was formed at a grievous detriment to the severer virtues by which the early Reformers had been distinguished. It is the testimony of a writer of their own age and party,

that the flame of piety among the Calvinists had been effectually extinguished by the dissolute and scandalous examples of their more worldly associates, and that debauchery advanced and overflowed among them far and wide, like an uncontrollable torrent.

The virtue, and with it the energy and the success, of the Protestants was further impaired, by the seductions to which their chiefs and leaders were exposed from their too frequent contact with Catherine and her court. Rank, office, and all the other allurements of royal patronage were employed to shake their fidelity; and Mèzerai asserts that more Huguenots were converted in four years by these methods, than had been induced to abandon their religion in forty years by the terrors of the scaffold and of the sword.

Even yet more fatal to the religious spirit, and, therefore, to the moral and political influence, of the Huguenots, were the sanguinary habits they contracted during many years of civil warfare. The atrocities of that dark era were not confined to the Catholics. As the contest proceeded, the parties on either side became gradually bereft, not only of the spirit of Christianity, but of the feelings of our common humanity; while the moral sense was paralysed, if not deadened, by the sight and the perpetration of remorseless cruelties. To men stained with such crimes, however sorely provoked to the commission of them, it was not given to raise aloft the cross of the Redeemer, and to announce the tidings of peace and reconciliation. By the lips of such heralds, even the Gospel itself was proclaimed in vain.

The relations between the Huguenot Church and the State being always those of antagonists, there subsisted between them no alliance to arrest that instability of religious opinions to which independent ecclesiastical bodies are so much addicted, or to infuse into the body politic those principles of social equality, and of

mental freedom, by which the Protestant Churches are habitually distinguished.

It was the error and the misfortune of the French Protestants to confide the conduct of their cause to the Princes of the House of Bourbon. The first of them, Anthony of Navarre, deserted and betrayed it, in the visionary hope that the Triumvirate would reward him by the exchange of his nominal crown for a real sovereignty. His brother, Louis de Condé, deserted and betrayed it, in the persuasion that Catherine would confer upon him the office of lieutenant-general of France. The younger Condé deserted and betrayed it, to rescue his life from the assassins of St. Bartholomew. Henry IV. twice abjured the Protestant creed, first for the preservation of his life, and then for the preservation of his Crown. These treacheries of the four Bourbons, whom the Huguenots followed in the civil wars, were only less fatal to their interests, than the unrelenting persecutions of the three Bourbons, who successively occupied the French throne between the death of Henry IV. and the accession of Louis XVI.

For it is to the persecutions to which the Protestants were exposed from the time of their first appearance in the city of Meaux, till the near approach of the French Revolution, that we must chiefly ascribe their failure to acquire the authority and influence necessary to their propagation of constitutional liberty in France. The story of these persecutions, so merciless, so unrelenting, and so continuous, fills vast volumes which have been dedicated to the memory of the sufferers, by the martyrologists of their own party. It is a story which no man would either willingly read, or repeat, or even abbreviate. It exhibits our common nature in its most offensive aspect. It pervades every era of the French annals. It assumes every conceivable form of cruelty and injustice, and many forms inconceivable to the darkest imagination,

unaided by an actual knowledge of those horrible details. If the most terrific act of this prolonged tragedy was the massacre of St. Bartholomew, the most revolting was the Dragonnades of Louis XIV. Catherine and her son had, at least, the excuse of believing that the enemies they destroyed were dangerous to their own safety, and their offence was not committed under the veil of any eminent devotion. Madame de Maintenon and her husband, on the other hand, neither felt, nor affected to feel, any dread of the myriads of helpless victims whom they impoverished, banished, imprisoned, and destroyed. But it was at the bidding of their confessors — with the cordial support of their priesthood — with prayers continually on their lips — and in the name of the Prince of Peace, that they daily offered up these human sacrifices. The blood of the martyrs has, indeed, been the seed of the Church, but not when the hearts of the persecutors have been sufficiently steeled against all lassitude, compunction, and remorse. In almost every part of Europe which at this day acknowledges the spiritual dominion of the Papacy, the sword, the scourge, the brand, and the axe, wielded by the secular powers, under the guidance of their spiritual advisers, have effectually arrested the progress of the Reformation. In France, those weapons were but too successfully employed, by the Houses of Valois and of Bourbon, to crush religious liberty, and with it to eradicate the seeds of constitutional freedom. But they were also, however, unconsciously employed to prepare the way for the convulsions by which two whole generations of mankind have been unceasingly agitated, and by which the Capetien Dynasty has again and again been subverted from its once immovable foundations.

## LECTURE XVIII.

## ON THE POWER OF THE PEN IN FRANCE.

AT the commencement of these lectures I observed, that it was the high office of History to trace out the progress of public opinion in moulding the character and the condition of the nations ; and I added, that, to indicate some of the steps of that progress in France, was the arduous task which I had ventured to propose to myself. It is, indeed, a task so arduous, that I ought perhaps to apologise for undertaking it at all. The leisure and the studies of a whole life would scarcely be sufficient for following the course of a few only of the many confluent streams by which the current of opinion was fed and swollen, as it shaped out the destinies of the French people. Who, indeed, shall undertake, with any confidence, to determine what were the political views, or what the moral sentiments, most widely diffused among them at each successive epoch of their national life ? Or who will pretend to such skill in the science of moral analytics, as to be able to resolve into their elements the motives by which they were actuated, or the judgments by which they were



guided, at even any one solitary period of the long centuries of their political existence? If the secrets of any single bosom baffle the keenest human scrutiny, how may we hope to penetrate the mysteries of those great social movements, in the production of which the wills of myriads, if not of millions, of independent agents were concurring?

I answer, that all we can expect, and perhaps all that we can desire, is to approximate to the true solution of these enigmas; and that, though nothing less than Omniscience can completely resolve them, yet the faculties entrusted to ordinary men may be sufficient to ascertain both what have been the predominant propensities of a great people during the growth and development of their power, and in what sources such national characteristics have chiefly originated. The foremost minds of France have, at all times, been not only the zealous authors, but the faithful interpreters also, of the thoughts and purposes of their successive generations. In the darkest, not less than in the brightest, seasons, a voice exhorting, guiding, and animating the French people, was ever raised — by the Church, through her ministers, and in her ministrations — by the Parliaments, through their illustrious magistrates — by the States General, through their patriotic leaders — and especially by Literature, through those master spirits who laboured, from one age to another, to enrich, to accumulate, and to transmit the intellectual patrimony of their own and of all succeeding times. It was, indeed, a voice which gave utterance to many discordant lessons; sometimes inculcating either the sacred truths and laws of our most holy faith, or the received doctrines of moral and political philosophy, or the sense of honour, or the love of country; and, on other occasions, teaching either a fatal Pyrrhonism, or an insatiable thirst for military glory and aggrandisement, or inexorable national antipathies, or ignoble superstitions, or religious

errors. But whatever might be the teaching of those whom, at successive epochs, France acknowledged as her spiritual and mental rulers, that teaching was never really ineffectual. It gradually moulded the mind of her people, and governed their resolutions. It fostered, when it did not create, in them much of that traditional character, at once so admirable in its beauties, and, in its deformities, so revolting. The husbandry bestowed on the hearts and on the understandings of Frenchmen, has ever been prolific of an abundant harvest. Their faults are not, and never have been, those of men abandoned to the untutored instincts and brute appetites of nature. Even in the wildest paroxysms of revolution and bloodshed, they have, for example, invariably and passionately maintained, that the commonwealth is constituted not for the advancement of material interests merely, but for higher and nobler, though too often, indeed, for impracticable, ends. They have frequently been subjected to the tyranny of the imagination. Sheer nonsense, in the masquerade of sublime abstractions, has continually ruled over them. They have bowed down to other tyrannies far baser and more oppressive than those. But, as a people, they have never taken Mammon for their God. They have not allowed the cares of life to annihilate its healthful illusions, or to poison its blameless delights. They have ever rendered a voluntary, or an unconscious, allegiance to those dominant minds of their nation, who have ruled by force of reason or eloquence, of wit or genius, justly or unjustly ascribed to them by the suffrages of the multitude.

He therefore, who would interpret the fate of the dynasties and of the people of France, must study her political, by the light of her ecclesiastical, forensic, and literary history. I need scarcely disavow any such ambitious purpose. My aim is far more humble. I design merely to throw out some passing suggestions on the influence exercised over the civil government and polity

of that kingdom,—not either by the Church, the Parliaments, or the States General, nor even by Literature in general,—but by some eminent men of letters. Among the countless authors to whose labours that influence may be more or less truly referred, I shall select a few only. But those few will be such as, from time to time, attained to a literary supremacy in their native land. To notice the rest, is to me, at least, as impossible as it would be superfluous. For all the writers who have in turns been elevated to the dictatorship of the Republic of Letters in France have a family resemblance, which attests their mental consanguinity. By means of that resemblance, their descent may be readily traced. Theirs is a lineage which, commencing with the patriarchs of remote ages, is perpetuated in the Guizots, the Cousins, and the Lamarlines of our own days. If we can seize the generic character of that imperial race, we shall sufficiently understand the nature of the impulses which, in successive ages, they have given to public opinion, partly by their own personal exertions, and partly by those of their imitators and disciples.

The literature of France is of a much earlier date than French literature. From the days of Charlemagne to those of St. Louis, a long series of French authors traversed the whole circle of the sciences; but they employed for that purpose, not French, but either classical, or scholastic, or rustic Latin. It is, indeed, only in deference to a national prejudice, as unfounded as it is inveterate, that I place Charlemagne and his learned courtiers among Frenchmen. The founders of each of the two imperial dynasties were both aliens from France. Charlemagne was in every sense of the word a German, as Napoleon was, in almost every sense, an Italian; and the school over which Alcuin presided at Aix la Chapelle was no more Gallican, than the academy founded by Richelieu at Paris was Teutonic.

The rustic Latin (or Roman, as it was called) of France was scarcely the same language to the north and to the south of the Loire. It was engrafted by the victorious Romans, after the age of Cæsar, on the aboriginal tongues spoken on either side of that river. But in Cæsar's time those tongues were themselves widely dissimilar. In the Celtic and Belgic provinces of Gaul there then prevailed different dialects of that widely diffused speech, which is at this day in use in Ireland, in Wales, in the North of Scotland, and in Brittany. In Aquitaine, on the other hand, both the vocabulary and the grammar were, at that period, Iberian rather than Gallic. There, also, the Greek of Marseilles and of the adjacent Ionian colonies, and the Arabic of the Saracenic invaders, each in turn left copious and rich deposits, both of words and of constructions; and the half-civilised Goths of Aquitaine contributed, far more than the barbarous Franks of Neustria or Austrasia, to ennoble and enlarge the popular speech of the nations among which they had respectively settled. For these reasons, and for others which I cannot now pause to mention, the rustic Latin of the North was a comparatively meagre and unformed tongue, while the rustic Latin of the South was a tongue comparatively affluent, graceful, and expressive. The northern variety passed into modern French. The southern, or Romance, dialect became the language of poetry and of the Troubadours. It was at length swept away under the desolating crusades which so nearly exterminated the populations of Provence and Languedoc.

I do not turn aside from my path to attempt any estimate of the influence of the Romance poetry on the character and polity of the French people, partly because that poetry is signalised by no one great and imperishable work, and partly because the problem has been so recently, and so completely, solved by M. Fauriel in his *Histoire de la Poësie Provençale*. He is one of those writers of whom

his country may be justly proud. Under a weight of erudition beneath which most men would stagger, he moves with the graceful ease which might seem to belong only to the lighter sports of fancy; while all the comprehensive and intricate principles at his command are evolved with that exquisite skill, the distinctive character of which is to hide itself in its own perfection. M. Fauriel is of course an enthusiast in his pursuit, for that was necessary to the success of it; but his enthusiasm has, unhappily, too much the mastery of him. He has always a smile, if not an apology, at hand for the moral delinquencies of his heroines and his heroes; and is, I think, never once moved to reprobate that systematic contempt for conjugal fidelity, by which the amatory strains he celebrates are habitually warmed and animated. I fully admit that the provinces of the moralist and of the critic are not the same; but I cannot admit that any man, and least of all that any man of genius, may, with impunity to his own mind, or without injury to the minds of others, treat with indifference, even in his critical capacity, the eternal distinctions between good and evil.

In proportion to our reverence for that sacred priesthood who, by eucharistic sacrifices of half-inspired verse, celebrate from one generation to another the works and ways of the Creator, joining, each according to his vocation and his gifts, in the unbroken chorus of meditation, of love, of gladness, or of resignation, which perpetually ascends from earth to heaven — in that same proportion will, I believe, be our distaste for the lyrics of the Troubadours. I know not, indeed, of any social phenomena more remarkable, than that there should have been found in any country a constant succession of men, and of men of no vulgar stamp, who, during more than a century and a half, sang their life-long changes on the same narrow round of amatory thoughts and fancies; and that, throughout all that time, such bards should have still

found a ceaseless throng of admirers to follow and to extol them. Not even the magic of M. Fauriel's style seems to me sufficient to rescue the perusal of his specimens of these interminable love-songs from disgust and lassitude. The spirit they breathe is so false, fictitious, and artificial, that their grace and wit are insufficient (at least in my judgment) to redeem them from aversion, and even from contempt. On a former occasion, I hazarded the opinion, that the connection was neither fortuitous nor obscure, but providential and significant, between the national character to which the Provençal poetry bears witness, and the destruction of the race for whose delight it was written, and by whose applauses it was rewarded.

But while in Southern France the most cultivated intellects were whiling away their existence under the narcotic influence of such strains as these, accompanied as they were by all the embellishments of music and the dance, a far sterner discipline was preparing the cultivators of letters in the North for that momentous controversy which was to be carried on there in the 12th century, upon some of those great questions which the most closely affect the present duties of mankind and their eternal prospects. The preparation for that debate had been made long before by many illustrious scholars of the Benedictine order, and especially by one of them whose name I cannot pass over in silence, although his writings have long since been laid aside and forgotten.

About the middle of the tenth century was living, at the monastery of St. Gerault, in Auvergne, a youth, of whose future eminence the abbot of that house had formed the highest hopes. His name was Gerbert; and, for the completion of his studies, the abbot (in what we should now call the spirit of an extreme liberality) sent him to Seville and Cordova, where Arabian teachers instructed their pupils in geometry, astronomy, arithmetic, and algebra. From those celebrated schools, Gerbert returned

to France to earn the reputation of a sorcerer. That he was concerting with Satan some unhallowed designs which the heart of man ought not to conceive, and which the tongue of man could not utter, was a belief not unnaturally drawn from the mysterious characters, the cabalistic signs, the groups of constellations, and the lines sloping in all directions, and meeting at all angles, which his hand was continually tracing. Or, if any reasonable doubt had existed, who could resist conviction when informed, as the world was widely informed, that while Gerbert was predicting all future events, and ascertaining all that had passed in former times, foul demons, in the form of gigantic bats, had been seen to envelope him in their sable wings ?

And yet Gerbert rose to be first a minister in the cathedral church of Rheims, and then to be the archbishop of that see. But his love of knowledge was insatiable, and to indulge it he resigned his mitre, and visited the schools of Italy. There his fame reached the ears of the emperor, Otho the Great, by whose influence he became archbishop of Ravenna ; until at length, under the name of Silvester II., he ascended the papal throne. The belief in his magical powers seems to have gathered strength by this last advancement ; and, as far as can now be ascertained or conjectured, it must be confessed, that the spells by which he wrought were, indeed, marvellous. An eloquent and pathetic writer, he stirred up the Pisans to the first expedition ever undertaken, by the powers of the West, for the defence of the pilgrims visiting the Holy Sepulchre. He studied and wrote upon antiquities, poetry, grammar, and logic. He is said to have taught the use of lofty and sharp-pointed poles as lightning conductors ; and he was the author of many books, which are reported to be still in the Royal Library of Paris. One of these, called *Rythmomachia*, is described as containing a comparison between the Arabic numerals and the algebraic

symbols, as far as relates to their respective uses, functions, and powers. In another we are told, that he explained, geometrically, the science of harmonics, the structure of clocks, and the various methods of working the keys of the organ, by water or by wind. Of his private life nothing, I believe, is recorded. But enough remains to show that, in that dark age, there was one Frenchman who had the heroism to cherish, and the genius to execute, the design of combining in his own person a twofold supremacy, and of reigning at once over the ecclesiastical, and the scientific, commonwealths of Christendom.

In the 12th century, however, the darkness of those times was to pass away. In that memorable age may be discerned the budding of the most prolific of those ideas, which were to yield their fruit at the era of the Reformation, and of the revival of letters. Commerce and the arts, philosophy and literature, then began to emerge from the shadows by which they had been so long enveloped. Then was the period of transition, from the mediæval barbarism to the modern civilisation, — the crisis at which light and order first begun to penetrate and to organise the preceding chaos. It was in that dawn of the intellectual and social renovation of a yet distant period that France first asserted her claim to be the chief instrument of Providence in civilising the European world. Her own monarchy had now become firmly settled in the Capetien race. She had taken the chief conduct of the Eastern crusades — the stormy source, as we have seen, of personal freedom, of political and military organisation, of commerce, and of learning. Her name had become familiar and formidable throughout the limits of the ancient empire ; and her arms had already diffused, beyond her own shores, some knowledge of her language. It was still, however, imperfectly formed ; and was unfit (at least in the judgment of her greatest men) for literary uses. The rustic Latin of the South had, indeed, been dedicated to such



uses by the Troubadours. But, in the north, the rustic Latin, or French, was still superseded by the Latin of ancient Rome, as often as men sought to impart or to acquire learning, or philosophy, whether theological or secular.

The throne of philosophy was then filled by a Frenchman, whose name has ever since occupied one of the foremost places in the literary annals of France. William, the son of a peasant of Champeaux, a town in Brie, was, in that age, a teacher of theology and logic to a crowd of students, who daily gathered round his chair in the cloisters of Notre Dame. Among them was a young Breton, whose short, feeble, and attenuated frame contrasted strangely with a countenance of which the expression (enthusiastic and voluptuous by turns) seemed to announce an habitual conflict between his spiritual and his sensual nature. At one time he poured out, for the delight of his companions, songs of his own composition, or charmed them by his jovial mirth, or entranced them by his mellifluous colloquial eloquence. At another, he startled and repelled them by a demeanour vehement, unsocial, and abrupt. Though still young, he had travelled far; passing, as a kind of philosophical Quixote, through every land in which glory was to be won in dialectic tilts and tournaments. The youth, whose temperament was at once so joyous, and irritable, and aspiring, could not long submit himself to the authority of the grave William of Champeaux.

Abandoning his master, Abeillard, or Abélard (for such was the name won for him by his honeyed discourse) established first at Melun, and then at Corbeil, a school of his own; where, such was the throng, and such the eager curiosity of his pupils, that they were content, during the season of his lectures, to dwell in huts rudely composed of reeds and mud. With characteristic self-reliance, Abélard commenced his academic course, by declaring war on the

doctrines of his former master; and as William of Champeaux had taught Realism, he announced himself as a devoted opponent of that doctrine. From Corbeil he returned to Paris; and there, taking his place on the mount, and in the gardens of Ste. Geneviève, he is said to have explained, to no less than 3000 scholars, each in turn of the philosophical systems of his age.

But philosophy was not his only pursuit. Fulbert, a canon of the church of Paris, inhabited a house in one of the islands of the Seine, where dwelt with him his niece Loise, or Héloïse; a damsel who, although she had not yet completed her seventeenth year, was passionately devoted to the pursuit of such knowledge as was then held in the highest esteem in the world of letters. At the mature age of forty, Abélard, then in holy orders, became the guest of Fulbert, and the teacher and seducer of Héloïse. With virtue they abandoned tranquillity and peace; and the revolting tale, on which romance and poetry have lavished so many meretricious ornaments, is not an idle fiction, but a melancholy truth.

In his subsequent seclusion, first at the Oratory of the Paraclete, and then at St. Gildas, in Brittany, Abélard resumed the office of a prælector, and became the great interpreter, in France, of the philosophical ideas of his own generation. In common with the other schoolmen of that day, it was his office to analyse the truths of Holy Writ by the logic of Aristotle, and to explicate them by the aid of Aristotle's moral and metaphysical doctrines. He was also the author of some books, of which a full account may be seen in the twelfth volume of the *Histoire Littéraire de France*. The most remarkable of them are said to be the "Hexameron," an allegorical review of the creation, and of the order of the material universe; and a book on self-knowledge, in which the author is charged with having taught, in its vilest form, the epicurean opinion, that the soul is exempt from all taint and all re-

sponsibility, whatever may be the excesses of the merely animal appetites.

I know nothing of the truth, or falsehood, of that imputation, for the book in question is not contained in the only series of the works of Abélard with which I have any acquaintance. I refer to the collection of them which was published in 1836, by M. Cousin, under the authority of M. Guizot, then the minister of public instruction in France, and which first made known to the world two of the most remarkable and characteristic of Abélard's writings.

I have said that he was a devoted opponent of Realism ; but you will not suppose that I am about to deviate into that great controversy. I advert to Abélard's contribution to it, chiefly as illustrative of the remarks which I shall hereafter have to make on the identity of the spirit of the most eminent philosophers of France, in ages the most remote from each other. How much there was in common between Abélard and his great successors, Montaigne, Bayle, and Blaise Pascal, may however be in some measure inferred, even from the following brief notice of his war with the Realists.

In his essay "*De Generibus et Speciebus*," Abélard ascribes to his master, William of Champeaux, and generally to the Realists of his times, a doctrine, which may perhaps be sufficiently understood from the following specimen or illustration of it, with which he amused his readers and himself.

Like all other universals, Humanity is a thing essentially one and indivisible. If to that one thing there accedes a certain congeries of forms, the result is to produce the individual man, Socrates. The accession to Humanity of another assemblage of forms, produces the man Plato. The Socratic forms and the Platonic forms may be totally dissimilar ; but beneath that diversity of species is veiled an absolute identity of genus. The same

universal man lives in both, though he be enveloped in each by different integuments.

To this doctrine, or rather to this illustration of the Realist doctrine, Abélard answers: First. If Plato be at Rome, and Socrates at Athens, then the universal man, who is common to them both, must be at the same moment at Athens and at Rome; that is, he must be in two places at once.

Secondly. The universal man, who has taken to himself the forms of Socrates, is inseparable from those forms. Wherever that universal man is, there also, consequently, must Socrates be. Therefore Socrates is at the same moment at Athens, and at every other place at which the universal man is present, under the forms of any other individual than Socrates himself.

Thirdly. As the universal man is the latent substratum of the forms of all individual men, it follows that wherever *any* man is found, there also is to be found *every* man. Indeed it is evident, that there is, after all, but one man in the world, who is appearing at each moment in some hundreds of millions of dissimilar aspects, and in as many separate places.

Fourthly. As the Socratic and the Platonic forms accede to and embrace, not merely the universal *man*, but also the universal *animal*, it is evident that if that animal be sick in Socrates, he must at the same time be sick in Plato; and so, if there be any one sick man, the whole world must be one vast hospital.

Finally. Seeing that the universal animal, under the species of certain living things, is rational, and, under the species of other living things, is irrational, and yet is alike enveloped, and alike alive in each of those things, there is no escaping the consequence that every animal is at once rational and irrational.

The *argumentum a cachinnatione* in this case, as in most

cases, proves little more than the vivacity of him who uses it. The Voltaire of the 12th century, like his great antitype of the 18th, was, however, not content to laugh down systems of belief, without building up others in their room. But while contending with Realism, he was unwilling to espouse the antagonist theory of the Nominalists, or to assert with them, that all universals, Humanity for example, or Animality, were mere words. For in the judgment of his age, and, I suppose, in his own judgment, that doctrine was irreconcilably opposed to many articles of the creed of the Church. That it was really opposed to the article of transubstantiation, seems indeed to admit of no doubt whatever. Every consistent Roman Catholic is a Realist. To avoid the reproach of heresy therefore, or perhaps for yet better reasons, Abélard devised that compromise between the contending parties to which metaphysicians have given the name of "Conceptionism." If universals were neither real entities, nor mere words, they must be so many conceptions of the mind. Even, therefore, if it be admitted that there is no substantive reality, except in individuals, yet, between different individuals, there are various resemblances and analogies which the mind observes and classifies. To the classes so formed, and to them alone, Abélard maintained that the characters either of genera, or of species, properly belonged.

M. Cousin, who has most luminously explained this compromise, thinks that, by means of it, Abélard rather evaded than solved the difficulty; and that, either unconsciously, or covertly, he was to the last, in the proper sense of the word, a Nominalist. I do not presume to express an opinion on this very subtle question; but from Abélard's treatise, called "*Sic et Non*," I cannot but surmise, that though the supposed tendency of Nominalism to subvert the foundations of the Christian faith might render him very reluctant to avow himself a No-

minalist, it might not really much indispose him to the acceptance of that philosophy.

The words "sic et non" might, perhaps, be best rendered into English by our homely phrase, *See-saw*. The Benedictines, and especially the excellent and learned D'Achery, had a copy of the book, which they laid aside as unfit for publication. I respect the firmer faith in the invulnerability of truth, which has induced M. Cousin to give it to the world, as I admire the charity with which that most eminent philosopher would reconcile Abélard's character as a sincere Christian and an honest man with his publication of such a treatise. M. Cousin regards it as a collection of theological problems, or contradictions, designed to fortify the mind by a salutary scepticism against the acceptance of any narrow and precipitate solutions, and so to prepare it for solutions of a more solid and durable nature. "The scepticism of Abélard," says his editor, "was merely provisional. He proposed, at some later period, to reconcile the contradictions which he thus brought together, and, by the power of logic, to reclaim men from doubt to faith and orthodoxy." That such was the real though unavowed design it is at least pleasant to believe, and who would refuse himself that pleasure, when assured by such a critic that it is a pleasure in which he may legitimately indulge. But, apart from that assurance, I confess that I should have thought that, in this case, a less favourable conclusion was inevitable.

In the Prologus of the "Sic et Non," Abélard insists on the difficulty of rightly understanding either the Authors of the Holy Scriptures or the Fathers; and he traces it to eight distinct causes. These are, first—the peculiarities of their style—secondly, their employment, on scientific subjects, not of scientific, but of popular language—thirdly, the corruption of their texts—fourthly, the number of spurious books ascribed to them—fifthly, their frequent retractations of their own previous state-

ments—sixthly, their careless use of their profane learning—seventhly, their habit of describing things, not as they really are, but as they appear, and as they are supposed by the vulgar to be—and, eighthly, their repeated use of the same words in two or more different senses. He advises that, when the apparent contradictions of the Scriptures cannot be explained by any of these considerations, we should abandon the manuscripts as inaccurate; and he further suggests that we should draw a broad distinction—between the canonical Scriptures, “in which everything is of necessity true,” and all other ecclesiastical writings—between the apostolical and all other scriptures—and between the sacred text and all comments upon it.

Then proceeding to establish the existence of these alleged contradictions, Abélard proposes a series of questions ranging nearly over the whole compass of theology and morals, and sets himself to show under each, that opposite or inconsistent answers to it may be drawn from the Holy Scriptures, or from the Fathers, or from both. Of those questions, the following are examples:—

“Quod non sit Deus singularis; et contra.—Quod sit Deus tripartitus; et contra.—Quod sit filius sine principio; et contra.—Quod nihil fiat casu; et contra.—Quod peccata etiam placeant Deo; et non.—Quod omnia possit Deus; et non.—Quod creatura sit adoranda; et non.—Quod nullâ de causâ mentiri liceat; et contra,” &c. &c.

On the manner in which the task of arraying scriptural against scriptural, patristic against patristic, authorities is thus accomplished, I offer no remark, except that the writer has evidently no scruple in asserting on any grounds, however slight, the actual existence of such a conflict between them. M. Cousin observes that under the incumbrance of quotations and precautions, both the thoughts and the style of Abélard falter; but adds that as he emerges from these defiles, and approaches the end of his work, he

resumes his force and freedom, until at length he loudly proclaims his cardinal principle, that doubt is the true key to wisdom — “*Dubitando enim ad inquisitionem venimus, inquirendo veritatem percipimus.*”

Notwithstanding the almost irresistible weight of M. Cousin's judgment, I confess myself (as, indeed, I have already said) to be unconvinced of the sincerity of Abélard's loud avowals of an implicit faith in the Scriptures. If we look rather to the evident tendency, than to the categorical expressions, of his book, it seems to me nothing else than an anticipation of the style in which many French, and not a few English, writers have conducted, and are still conducting, their assaults on Christianity. No one can have much acquaintance with the literature of either country, who is ignorant that it is amongst the common artifices of the more recent enemies of our faith to assert their implicit acceptance of its credentials — to undertake an orthodox interpretation of many passages of its sacred canon — and even to set themselves to refute objections to its truth — taking good care, however, in their assumed office of Christian advocates, to throw into their statement of those objections the accumulated weight of their learning, and the whole force of their reasoning powers.

To the “*Dubitando ad inquisitionem, inquirendo veritatem*” of Abélard, a voice of incomparably greater force and eloquence even than his answered, from the eastern frontiers of France, in apostolic language:—“*Animalis Homo non percipit ea quæ sunt Spiritûs Dei. Stultitia enim est ei; et non potest intelligere, quia spiritualiter examinatur.*” It was the voice of Bernard of Clairvaux, perhaps the noblest, and certainly the most persuasive, of all those imperial spirits who have successively contributed to mould the intellectual and moral character of his and their native country.

In the year 1100, Robert, a monk of the order of St.



Benedict, established a religious brotherhood at Citeaux, which was at that time a waste or forest on the confines of Champagne and Burgundy. Under his directions, an oratory, with a group of surrounding cottages, was erected there for that branch of the great Benedictine family, which afterwards derived from the place the distinctive designation of Cistercian. Within ten years, Robert had been succeeded in the government of the monastery by St. Stephen Harding, an Englishman, under whose guidance the monks, as we are assured by their annalist, laboured with the most austere self-discipline to regain the sacred image in which our race was originally created. The path they trod was indeed a rugged one; for while their brethren of the princely house of Cluny denounced their ascetic practices as schismatical innovations, disease was hurrying one after another of the new fraternity to premature graves.

Much perplexed to discover why it pleased the Supreme Disposer of events so to afflict the most devoted of his worshippers, St. Stephen (so runs the accepted legend), as he stood by the couch of one of his dying followers, commanded him, in the name of holy obedience, to return, after his death, to Citeaux, with such intelligence as he might be able to obtain in the world of departed spirits, both as to the divine pleasure regarding the Cistercians, and as to the light in which it behoved themselves to consider their own scheme and manner of life. The monk died, and, I need scarcely add, revisited the abbey, bringing with him the welcome intelligence, that the conventual practices in use there were most acceptable to the Supreme Judge; and authorised to assure them that, ere long, they should see their oratory thronged with new brethren, of whom many should be great, many rich, and many noble, but who, after a temporary abode at Citeaux, should, like so many swarms of bees quitting their native hive, be dispersed on every side, receiving and imparting benedictions. Falling

on their knees, the few survivors of the Cistercian brotherhood implored the fulfilment of this gracious promise; and, while the prayer was yet on their lips, a procession was seen to advance slowly through the forest, to the gates of the monastery. It was preceded by Bernard, then a youth in his twenty-first year, whose commanding form and expressive countenance enhanced the admiration due to his free and graceful bearing. Casting themselves at the feet of St. Stephen, Bernard and his companions demanded and obtained permission to perform their noviciate at Citeaux; and then the joyful and now united companies joined in the sacred strain, "Rejoice thou barren that bearest not; break forth and sing thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband."

Unless we refuse to listen at all to monastic stories, we must be content to receive them in the monastic style, and with the usual monkish embellishments. But the circumstances which had really moved Bernard to migrate to Citeaux, though scarcely less marvellous than these, are far more authentic.

Elizabeth, the daughter of the Count of Montbar, bore to her husband Tecelin, the Lord of Fontaines, six sons, of whom Bernard was the third, and one daughter, to whom her parents gave the name of Humbeline. Tecelin was a great captain, and while he took the field at the head of his vassals, Elizabeth instilled into the minds of her children those sacred lessons which maternal love most effectually teaches. One after another of her sons, however, in due time, followed their father to the wars, Bernard alone being left to listen to the instructions of his mother. They sank so deeply into his heart, that the kindly discipline of his childhood ripened into the philosophy of his declining years; into that philosophy which discovers, in the exercise of love, the foundation of all our knowledge, either of divine or of human things.

From the heavenward aspirations to which he was thus trained from infancy, Bernard derived that fascinating eloquence which bound, as with an irresistible spell, every one with whom he was brought into communication. To such a mind as his, animated by such filial remembrances, it was natural, and perhaps easy, in the very morning of life, to prefer to all which this world has to promise, the cell and the austerities of an anchorite. Such seeming prodigies admit a very simple and familiar explanation. But to persuade all the members of his family to assume the same indissoluble fetters, required a power of persuasion, in which he probably never found a successful imitator, except, indeed, in the person of Angélique Arnauld, the illustrious abbess of Port Royal des Champs. In obedience to his voice, first Gaudry, Count de Touillon, his uncle, a renowned soldier, exchanged his coat of mail for the monastic habit. Then Barthelemy, his brother, resigned, at his invitation, the service of the Duke of Burgundy for the life-long obscurity and privations of a convent. Andrew, another of his brothers, while listening to his words, had his eyes opened to see their mother smiling upon them from her abode in Paradise, and laying down his sword, he consecrated the remainder of his days to prayer and meditation. Guido, who was the eldest son of their parents, and the heir to the estates and honours of their house, rendered a still more impressive homage to the eloquence of his brother. Surrendering all his wealth and prospects, he even divorced himself from the wife of his youth, and joined the little band which acknowledged Bernard as their spiritual conductor. Gerard, the second of the sons of Tecelin and Elizabeth, strove, but strove in vain, to resist the universal fascination. And when this last victory had been won, Bernard, attended by Barthelemy, by Andrew, by Guido, and by Gerard, presented himself before their father Tecelin to obtain his last blessing ere the separation should

be completed which was to leave the widowed old man with no child to sustain the infirmities of his age, except his daughter Humbeline, and Nivard his youngest son.

The agony of that parting had just been endured, when, as the five youths were for the last time quitting their parental roof, Nivard met them, and immediately joining his brethren, followed the steps of Bernard to the desert. Of thirty persons who accompanied him to Citeaux, six were thus members of his own family — his uncle and his brothers. Not long after, Humbeline also appeared at the gates of the abbey. She sought, it is said, to win back Bernard to the world which worshipped her, and which she, at that time, worshipped. The words interchanged between them were few, but those few words riveted on her inmost soul such convictions of the vanity of life, as made her fly from it to the severe, but, as she now judged, the salutary and peaceful solitude of the cloister. Deserted by all his children, Tecelin himself at last sought, and, let us hope, did not seek in vain, for consolation, by submitting himself as a simple monk to the spiritual government of his own child, Bernard, then the Abbot of Clairvaux.

Clairvaux, a fair valley, as the word implies, lies between the slopes of two opposite ranges of hills, at the distance of about twelve miles from the city of Bar-sur-Aube. One of the promised swarms of conventual bees had migrated thither from Citeaux, under the guidance of Bernard, and there he passed the whole of his earthly pilgrimage, unless when either the extremity of disease, or his zeal for the interests of the Church, occasionally drew him to a distance. Except by such maladies and such journeys, the monotony of his monastic life was unbroken, and no skill in narrative could render the detail of it either interesting, or really intelligible. It is almost superfluous to say, that strains of unearthly music, audible to no ears but his, would sometimes rise and die away along the

walls of his monastery, — that celestial visitants descended into his cell, — that Benedict himself came from the abodes of the blessed to hold communion with his illustrious disciple, — and that she who was blessed above women, the very goddess of the place, not seldom presented herself there, to the adoring eyes of her enraptured worshipper. Neither was there any lack of miracle. Paralysis and epilepsy disappeared at the bidding of the saint ; and, stranger still, by exclaiming *excommunico eas*, he caused the instant death of so vast a multitude of flies, who were interrupting the dedication of the church of Foigny, that, says the chronicler, the attendants carried them out by shovelful.

This biography of the cloister is at once so monotonous and in effect at least, if not in design, so profane, that it may well excite our wonder that so many good men should have repeated, and that so many same men should have believed it. But not even the coarse handling of those who have undertaken to write the life of Bernard can reduce him to the level of a vulgar hero of ecclesiastical romance. In the history of mankind there is no passage better attested, and none more worthy of diligent meditation, than that which exhibits him as exercising, over the men of his own and of future times, a moral dominion, more enduring and more extensive than that of the greatest ecclesiastical or secular potentate — a dominion acquired by his own regenerate soul and magnificent understanding, without the aid of any temporal advantages, or of any external power ; except, indeed, that power which he drew from his unceasing communion with the eternal fountain of holiness and of light.

To us of this generation it may appear inexplicable, how the ruler of a convent, erected by himself in a wilderness, remote from cities, and seldom visited by even a solitary traveller, should attain to such authority, not only amongst his own nation, but throughout Europe at large.

But, in the days of Bernard, while all other powers were separated from each other by wars, or ignorance, or by the dissolution of ancient kingdoms into petty fiefs, the clerical order was bound together by a closer and a firmer chain of mutual dependencies, and a more regular subordination, than at any preceding or subsequent period. Not only had the victories of Hildebrand and his immediate successors attached the whole ecclesiastical hierarchy, with increased firmness, to Rome; but the Benedictine order, as yet unrivalled by any new monastic institutes, formed a vast corporation, the affiliated societies of which, in every state and province, and almost in every canton of the Christian world, lived in constant intercourse with each other, and with their common head. In that age, intelligence was diffused, opinion directed, and fame bestowed throughout the world, partly by those Benedictine convents, and partly by the great schools of France and Italy. The accession of Bernard to their order, followed, as it was, by the conquest of all his kindred, was an event well calculated to arrest the attention, and to excite the curiosity, of the dispensers of reputation in those times: nor was he really concealed at Clairvaux from the personal notice of some of the most eminent of their number.

William of Champeaux, the teacher of Abélard, had by this time become bishop of Chalons; and, in the vacancy of the diocese of Langres, had officiated at the consecration of the monastery of Clairvaux. He found in the abbot a realist quite as zealous as himself, but incomparably his superior in range of thought and energy of speech; and when the bishop directed Bernard to preach in all the churches of the see of Chalons, the concourse, the delight, and the conversions of his hearers were such as to announce the appearance of another Chrysostom.

Seven hundred years had then rolled away since the Church had been admonished, or comforted, by the voice of any of her Fathers. They had disappeared, those venerable men who, amidst the decay of all secular learn-

ing, had so long maintained the empire, not of religion alone, but of eloquence also, of literature, of philosophy, and of criticism. As age after age passed on, the Church, no longer accustomed to listen to that profound discourse, and to those heart-searching exhortations, had ceased to anticipate the revival of them. To the men of the 12th century, the language of Bernard, at once so vehement and so pathetic, came, therefore, not only with all the power of truth, but with all the force of novelty. It seemed to them as if Augustine had once more risen up to resume his ancient and undisputed sovereignty. They regarded their new apostle as one to whom such abundant disclosures had been made by the Father of lights, as rendered himself a kind of living revelation. They venerated him as a saint, whose mental vision, unclouded by the dark veil of sense, ranged over all the awful realities of our present and our future existence. They believed that the faith by which he had overcome the world, as the foe of his own mental purity, was of power to overcome it, also, as the inveterate enemy of the everlasting Gospel. And bowing down (as our race will ever bow down) before a mind which, in an absolute servitude to the Divine will, has regained and rejoices in its own native freedom, they exalted him to a moral dominion which, at the culminating point of his own greatness, either Julius or Charlemagne might have contemplated with envy.

It was for these reasons, or for reasons such as these, that the Christian world referred to the arbitrament of Bernard many of the greater questions by which it was, at that time, agitated. Among these were the rival pretensions of Innocent II. and of Anaclet II., each of whom was claiming the apostolic throne on the death of Honorius, in 1130. Anaclet retained possession of Rome, and of the other chief Italian cities. He had secured the support of Roger, the Norman duke of Sicily, by the double promise of exchanging his ducal coronet for a royal crown and of bestowing on him the dignity of Patrician

of Rome. In northern Italy, and especially in Milan, Conrad of the House of Hohenstauffen, a pretender to the empire, had numerous and active partisans, who accepted or courted the alliance of Anaclet; and the ever ready sympathy of the powerful Duke and cities of Aquitaine, with the free Italian republics, extended the interest of Anaclet throughout the whole of the south of France.

It was in the north of that country that Innocent sought for spiritual subjects and for defenders. But Louis le Gros would neither take up arms in his support, nor undertake to determine whether he was, indeed, the lawful successor of St. Peter. For the decision of that arduous question, he summoned a national synod to assemble at Étampes, and himself met there in person the northern bishops, and all the greater abbots of the north. There, also, by the express command or invitation of the king, appeared the Abbot of Clairvaux. To him the assembly, with one voice, referred the preliminary investigation of this great controversy, as, with one voice, they afterwards assented to his judgment, that Innocent was the true pope, and the lawful head upon earth of the Church of Christ. Louis, acquiescing in this sentence, immediately placed his kingdom under the obedience of Innocent; and Bernard became the patron of his claims in all the other states of Europe.

He enforced those claims successfully on the kings of England, Scotland, Arragon, and Jerusalem, in letters conceived (to judge of them collectively from a single specimen) in a tone as authoritative as had ever been assumed at the palace of the Lateran. To Lothaire, the German emperor elect, Bernard addressed himself for the same purpose in person in Liege. But Lothaire refused to hear the voice of the charmer, charmed he never so wisely, unless Innocent would reward his adhesion by renouncing the long disputed papal title to investiture,—and, to such a sacrifice, all the confederate powers of



earth and hell could not have tempted or terrified the inexorable abbot. Yet defeat did not seem to be among the possibilities of Bernard's existence. Intelligence of the union between the partisans of Conrad and the followers of Anaclet, arrived at Liege in time to induce Lothaire to waive this claim, and to join with Innocent in a common hostility against their common enemies.

In William, Duke of Aquitaine, Bernard next encountered a still more refractory antagonist. The chroniclers of the age employ their darkest colours in their portrait of the duke. The least of the vices of which they accuse him is the habit of eating habitually, for his own share, as much as would have kept eight stout yeomen in health. His pastimes were still more offensive; for, if we will believe his accusers, he was accustomed to compel his vassals to fight like gladiators for his amusement. This Gargantua had, however, it seems, a heart in his bosom, which once and again melted under the burning eloquence of Bernard, but which, as often, resumed its cold rigidity when that genial influence was withdrawn. At length (so runs the legend) the saint, after having pronounced the awful words of consecration of the host, in a church in which William was worshipping, descended the steps of the altar, his whole countenance glowing as with a radiant flame, and his uplifted hand sustaining the sacred elements as approaching the obdurate duke, he thus addressed him, "Long have I entreated, and thou hast set at nought my entreaties. Many of the servants of God have joined their prayers to mine, and thou hast despised their prayers. Behold, now, the very Son of the Virgin — him whom thou persecutest — the supreme head and lord of the Church — the judge at whose name every knee in earth, in heaven, and in hell must bow! The soul which now animates thee awaits the sentence of that great judge, the avenger of guilt. Wilt thou despise him also, and scorn the master as thou hast scorned his servants?"

Falling on his face (proceeds the chronicle), as he listened to this fearful apostrophe, the duke uttered appalling cries of agony, and, on regaining his self-command, not only tendered his homage to Innocent, but divesting himself of all his dominions, honours, and estates in favour of his daughter Eleonora, the destined wife of Louis VII., abandoned the world itself, and in his thirty-eighth year retired to some place of religious seclusion, where history loses all further trace of him.

I do not pause to winnow the truth from the monkish ornaments which disfigure this narrative. It best illustrates as it stands, if not the actual occurrences of the times, yet at least the estimation in which Bernard was held by his contemporaries. We know from the incomparably more authentic information of his own letters, how they received and seconded his labours in the same Papal cause, both in the German and the Italian courts.

From them we learn that, under his influence, and by his persuasion, peace was established between Pisa and Genoa, and their respective allies in Lombardy; a peace which not only brought to an end a long and cruel war, but which opened a passage into Italy to Lothaire, who, with Innocent in his camp, was advancing to the mountains. When he crossed them, no enemy remained to the north of the Apennines to oppose his progress, for Conrad of Hohenstauffen and his Milanese supporters were no longer able to derive either aid or shelter from the belligerents who had sheathed their swords at the voice of Bernard. Lothaire, therefore, advanced to Rome with Innocent, and there received from his hands the papal unction and the imperial crown. He did not, however, dispossess Anaclet, either of the church of St. Peter, or of the castle of St. Angelo, but, returning to Germany, left the rival popes to contend with each other by spiritual weapons.

Of such arms Bernard was an absolute master; and at a council holden at Pisa, he successfully employed in the

service of Innocent, and as his representative, all the eloquence for which he was renowned, and all the authority which he had acquired by the pacification of Lombardy. The synod, at his instance, solemnly excommunicated Anaclet and his supporters.

Anselm, the archbishop of Milan, was one of the most considerable of that number; and to Milan, therefore, Bernard proceeded to enforce the sentence against him. All the resources of hyperbole are exhausted by the chroniclers in their attempt to describe and celebrate his reception in the city of Ambrose. As in the case of that illustrious Father, the magistrates and clergy, followed by a countless multitude of the citizens, thronged the approaches to his residence, resolved to place him by force, if necessary, on the archiepiscopal throne. Never was such advancement more ingeniously avoided. The enthusiastic crowd was quieted and dispersed by his assurance that, on the morrow, he would mount his horse, and that if the animal should remain within the city walls, he would accept the proffered mitre, but if it should pass them, he should regard himself as free from any such obligation. The returning day found the saint in the saddle, and galloping with his utmost speed through the gates of Milan. A gleam of merriment, perhaps, for once lighted up those contemplative features; and, ere long, his horse had added to this good service, by carrying him from the tumults of Italy to the tranquillity of Clairvaux.

His repose, however, was but brief. Returning to Germany, he induced Lothaire to pass the Alps again at the head of a force destined for the conquest of Sicily, and for the overthrow of Anaclet. As the emperor drew near to Rome, the indefatigable Bernard appeared once more to guide and to encourage him. But the expedition was not successful. The Sicilian duke, indeed, sustained a defeat near Salerno, but not long after Lothaire himself died. In the succeeding year he was followed to the grave by Anaclet, by whose cardinals, however, was chosen another

pope, who assumed the name of Victor. But with the pretensions, Victor did not inherit the perseverance, of his predecessor. He thought the contest either hopeless or sinful, or both; and presenting himself to Bernard, he placed in his hands the abdication of his title to the Papacy. The schism thus reached its close; and, at the end of anxieties and labours which had been protracted through seven successive years, the abbot returned to his monastery with no worldly or ecclesiastical wealth or dignities, but yet in the consciousness of having rendered to mankind a service which both he and they regarded as inestimable, and which they repaid by such veneration, and by so cordial an applause, as had never greeted the most triumphant of military conquerors.

The repose thus laboriously purchased was, however, to be short-lived. Innocent did not long survive his rival Anaclet, and before March, 1145, three popes had in succession filled the papal throne. It was then transferred by the unanimous voices of the College of Cardinals, to Bernard of Pisa, a disciple of Bernard of Clairvaux, and once a brother of that monastery, where, however, he had been so lightly esteemed, that his appointed office had been to light and feed the fires at which the other monks were to warm themselves when chilled by their nocturnal devotions. But, on his election, he assumed the name of Eugenius, and quickly proved that the mantle of Urban II. had descended upon him.

Intelligence of the capture of Edessa by the Moslem had reached and alarmed Europe almost at the moment of the election of Eugenius. Bernard called upon the pope to unsheathe each of the two swords of Peter. Eugenius accordingly invoked the aid of the then eldest son of the Church, Louis le Jeune. To him such an appeal was happily timed, and welcome. The destruction of many of his own subjects in an attack on the city of Vitry, hung heavily on his conscience; and the crime, as he judged, could not

be so effectually expiated as by the slaughter of a hundred-fold the same number of Saracens at Edessa. Thus both the spiritual and the temporal sovereigns of Bernard joined in addressing to him a commission, or rather a command, to preach a new crusade to the faithful in France and Germany.

Though his body was worn by fatigue, wasted by sickness, and emaciated by fasts and self-discipline, the soul of Bernard rose and expanded itself to the height of this sacred summons. In Easter of the year 1146, his attenuated figure, but still beaming eye, were conspicuous in the front of a lofty stage, erected on the slope of one of those hills which environ the town and plain of Vezelay. There sat the King and his Queen Eleonora, and by them stood the great vassals, and prelates, and barons of his realm, with a throng of inferior knights and seigneurs; while, in the front of this royal assemblage, was gathered a mighty host, crowding the hill sides and the plain below, and all awaiting in breathless silence the voice of the renowned orator who stood before them.

There is, I believe, no extant record of his speech, though never, before or since, was eloquence rewarded by so signal a triumph. He appears to have given a rhetorical impersonation to the Holy City, and in her name to have been calling on his hearers to rescue her from the grasp of the followers of the False Prophet, when he was interrupted by a shout arising simultaneously from all the countless ranks of that agitated multitude, thousands and tens of thousands of voices raising, repeating, and again and again re-echoing the exclamation, "It is the will of God!" A single soul seemed to have possessed the whole of that innumerable company. Casting himself at the feet of the speaker, the king first received from his hands the cross, which irrevocably bound him who bore it to engage in person in that perilous adventure. Beside her lord, and devoted to the same high enterprise, knelt

Eleonora. The princes, bishops, barons, knights, and seigneurs followed her example, and then the commons, wave after wave pressing forward, in interminable succession, to the immediate presence of Bernard, continued till nightfall and through the whole of the succeeding day, to besiege him with importunate demands for crosses, until, after exhausting every other resource, he had torn his own Benedictine habit into shreds, to serve as badges for this noble army of martyrs.

The great master of the spell, himself inflamed by the enthusiasm which he thus excited, hurrying from province to province, and from city to city, everywhere demanded new champions of the Holy Sepulchre. At Chartres, another mighty congregation listened and obeyed, but not without a response, which, little as it was either foreseen or welcomed by Bernard, seems not to have been altogether unreasonable. They demanded that, exchanging his cowl and tunic for a coat of mail, he should, in his own person, conduct them to the warfare against the infidel. He still retained, however, too much sobriety for this. Perhaps he had already awakened to the truth that, among his half-maddened associates, there were not a few with whom it would ill suit him to contract so intimate a personal alliance.

Of that number was Rodolph, a German monk, who had taken on himself the task of arousing the zeal of his fellow-countrymen. But Rodolph was one of those men who, when they have once yoked themselves to any principle, are dragged helplessly along by it into the most extravagant of all its seeming consequences. It was meritorious to slay the enemies of the Cross in Palestine; could it then be right, or allowable, to spare them in Germany? Finding the question unanswerable, Rodolph, from the sources to the mouths of the Rhine, besought his hearers to prepare themselves for the destruction of the Saracens by the massacre of the Jews.

I doubt whether the title of any of the Saints of the Church of Rome to the honours of canonisation, could be justified by any proofs of his having cultivated the virtue of toleration, excepting only in the single case of Bernard of Clairvaux. It was with a noble inconsistency that he dissented from the inexorable logic of Rodolph. For, while himself sounding the trumpet which marshalled the Christian nations of Europe to the slaughter of the unbelieving inhabitants of Asia, he addressed to the German people an encyclical epistle, commending the hereditary enemies of the Gospel to their kindness and forbearance, in terms as eloquent as could have been dictated by Jeremy Taylor, and as wise as could have been suggested by John Locke, if those apostles of toleration had then been living.

Nor was it by his letters only that Bernard taught the Germans to be at once thus merciful and merciless. During many weeks or months he traversed their land in person, attended by some of the monks of his order, who have left us a daily journal of that miraculous peregrination; for every step was a miracle. So numerous and so stupendous were the prodigies which he wrought in stimulating his proselytes to march to the holy war, that death and disease may be said to have retired, like vanquished foes, at his presence. The authors of these narratives, however, select, as the miracle of miracles, the conversion of the Emperor Conrad III., and his assumption of the Cross. It may seem presumptuous to dispute their judgment on such a question; but, to myself, the most prodigious of all the prodigies they record, and certainly the best attested, appears to be the fact, that though he was totally ignorant of German, and always preached in French, yet such was the magic of Bernard's discourses, even when utterly incomprehensible to his hearers, that, from Constance to Cologne, the Teutonic gravity was everywhere rapt at his bidding into an immu-

table resolution to march from the banks of the Rhine to those of the Jordan. I have no doubt of the general good faith with which all these marvels are told ; nor do I think that these *Itinera Germanica* are destitute of a real and appropriate value. They curiously illustrate the strange extent to which vast masses of men, under the sympathetic influence of any profound emotion, may become utterly incapable of the natural use, not only of their reasonable understandings, but even of their bodily senses.

Leaving his German proselytes to prepare for their long pilgrimage to the East, Bernard returned to France, to expedite the departure of that mighty armament, and then retired to the devout and placid solitude of Clairvaux. There, in due time, he learnt that the war which he had so exultingly provoked, had swept away at least two hundred thousand of his fellow countrymen and fellow Christians ; the helpless victims of woes as fearful, as they were profitless and inglorious. There is still living, in the person of the Abbé de Ratisbonne, his latest biographer, at least one devout and zealous apologist of the author of this lamentable carnage ; and from the Abbé we may learn, that, in the retrospect of this great catastrophe, Bernard found nothing to disturb the tranquillity of his cell and of his conscience. Adopting what seems to me at once the more probable and the more charitable opinion, I rather conclude that the review of the calamities which his ill-directed zeal had brought on his country and on mankind, was the immediate cause which brought his life to an unexpected, though not an early close, not long after the return of Louis with the poor fragments of the noblest army which had ever followed the *Oriflamme* of St. Denys, under the guidance of a king of France.

The preceding account of the mighty influence exercised by Bernard over some of the great movements of his age, will not have been misplaced, if (as I trust) it shall contribute to render intelligible to you the still more powerful



control which he exercised over its opinions. To estimate aright the extent of that authority, it would indeed be requisite to refer in some detail to the collection of his letters, almost all of which relate to the questions, political or religious, by which his generation was chiefly agitated. They show that he was employed day by day, continually, in adjusting the disputes of princes, in considering the complaints of their subjects, in redressing the grievances of the oppressed, in arbitrating between litigants, in founding monasteries and bishoprics, in providing for the wants of all the churches; and, above all, in the decision of controverted points of doctrine. "*Aiunt non vos esse Papam*" (he says to Pope Eugenius) "*sed me, et undique ad me confluunt qui habent negotia.*" And in this character of a substituted or auxiliary pontiff, elected by general acclamation, we find him ruling the deliberations and guiding the decisions of almost every ecclesiastical synod of his times; but of none with results more remarkable than those which followed the acts of the council holden in the year 1121, in the city and church of Sens.

Rallying his strength and spirits after the great calamity of his life, Abélard had resumed his chair in the University of Paris, or rather amidst the students whom his reputation still drew round him, on the mount and in the gardens sacred to Ste. Geneviève, the patroness of that city. His speculations on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity had been communicated, not merely to his pupils there, but to the world at large, in a book which awakened the alarms and stimulated the zeal of the orthodox Abbot of Clairvaux. If Bernard be accurate, it reproduced and combined the heresies of Arius, of Pelagius, and of Nestorius. But he was too good and wise a man to make any public assault upon the writer of it, until he had first endeavoured, by a private and friendly remonstrance, to convince him of his errors, and to induce him to retract them. The vulgar arts of vulgar controversialists were beneath the genius, and

alien from the spirit, of St. Bernard; and, winning by his kindness an opponent whom he might probably have exasperated by less gentle methods, he induced Abélard at least to promise a retractation. The promise, however, was not fulfilled. On the contrary, Abélard, reverting to his former habits of thought, published other books of the same general tendency, and among them the treatise called "Sic et Non," to which I have already adverted.

Bernard then broke silence, and, in a letter to Pope Innocent II., he denounced, not merely the doctrines of Abélard, but the whole scheme and system of investigation which had conducted him to them, invoking the authority of the Pope to suppress so great a scandal. Abélard answered by equally loud protestations of his innocence and orthodoxy, and appealed to a council then about to be holden in the city of Sens.

Never had tidings of an approaching tournament excited more universal interest in France, than was kindled by the intelligence of the passage at arms, which was accordingly appointed to take place between the two great doctors and rhetoricians of that age. Bernard, however, was at first reluctant to engage in the contemplated debate. He answered the summons of the Archbishop of Sens in the words of David: "I am but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth." But he was not permitted so to withdraw from the conflict with the Goliath of Rationalism. It was, he says, with tears in his eyes, that he at length consented to meet this terrible adversary; but it was with faith and hope in his heart. He strengthened himself by revolving the words of Christ, "Take no thought how, or what, ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak." And again borrowing the language of David, he comforted himself by the words, "The Lord is my strength, I will not fear what man can do unto me." The event showed that any other prepara-

tions for this dreaded encounter would have been superfluous.

In the great church of Sens appeared all the Fathers of the council, and there also appeared Louis VII. himself, with the chief dignitaries of his realm, ecclesiastical and secular, all animated with the same curiosity to listen to the anticipated debate between the two master spirits of the age.

It was opened by Bernard. He produced the writings of Abélard, enumerated his imputed errors, and demanded that he should either vindicate or retract them. Expectation was raised to the highest pitch, when, to the surprise and disappointment of the whole assembly, the eloquent Abélard remained inflexibly silent. He was either unable, or unwilling, to utter a single word in his own defence, and at length precipitately quitted the synod, after interposing an appeal to the Pope against their decision. They rejected his appeal, and unanimously condemned his doctrines as heretical. Once again the now victorious Bernard borrowed from David the language in which to express the feelings with which he contemplated the triumphant result of this much dreaded controversy. "I myself," he exclaimed, "have seen the ungodly in great power, and flourishing like the green bay-tree. I went by, and, lo! he was gone; I sought him, and his place was nowhere to be found." The proceedings of the Council of Sens were then transmitted to Rome, and the Pope, confirming their decision, sentenced Abélard to an eternal silence.

The defeated philosopher did not prolong the struggle. His spirit seems to have been broken by affliction, and his body worn by labour and excitement. He sought for tranquillity by publishing what has been usually called his retraction, though it would perhaps, with greater reason, be called his apology for his writings. But neither Bernard, nor any of the theologians of the times, pressed

hardly on their fallen foe. He was a Samson Agonistes, terrible even in defeat, and his conquerors wisely acquiesced in his retractation, such as it was, and sought by kindness to restore him to the bosom of the Church. Within two years from the close of this dispute he was summoned from the world in which he had accumulated so much knowledge, but had attained to so little happiness. Before his death, the friendship which had once subsisted between Bernard and himself was re-established. Nor can we doubt that, in the contemplation of that great event, both the Realist and the Nominalist derived comfort from the belief that, in passing from the world of shadows into the regions of light, they should both find a far more perfect solution of those deep mysteries than they had been able to attain, either in the cloisters of Clairvaux, or in the schools of Paris.

"To speak it plainly," says M. Guizot, "Protestantism is nothing else than the insurrection of the human mind against the spiritual despotism of the sacerdotal order." To the reclamations of such insurgents in the 12th century, the Church of Rome opposed not merely the sacred text as interpreted by primæval and unbroken traditions, but also another authority, less liable than these to be perverted or misunderstood, yet (as she maintained) of an origin not less divine. The Deity himself (said the realist and orthodox doctors of that age) has engraven on the souls of all the children of Adam many legible and most significant characters. These inscriptions, though coeval in each man with his birth, may be obscured by carnality or worldliness, as, on the other hand, they may be rendered more luminous and intelligible by self-discipline, and by habits of devotion and of virtue. But whether darkened or illuminated, they must still remain indelible in every human bosom, at once bearing witness to the truths which it is the office of the Church to perpetuate, and rendering the acceptance of them not so much a duty, as a law and

a necessity of our moral nature—a necessity which ceases, indeed, then, but only then, when the soul to which such truths are proclaimed, being blinded by its own pollutions, is effectually deprived of its spiritual discernment.

Such I believe to be an accurate summary of the doctrine of St. Bernard on this subject. But I would rather present it to you in his own words:—“There is,” he says, “nothing in the Divine intellect which is not eternal and immutable. Thus, those *principia rerum*, which Plato calls ideas, are not mere mental images. Possessing the attributes of eternity and immutability, they must be realities; nor does any thing exist, whatever may be the mode of its existence, except by an union to them.”—

“A spirit, whose origin and abode is celestial, has ever before her eyes the mirror in which she contemplates all things. She beholds the Divine Logos; and *in* the Logos the whole of the creation which the Logos has called into existence. So that she does not draw her knowledge of the Creator from the creation; nor, when she would attain to the knowledge of created things, is it necessary for her to descend among them; for she beholds them all in a position where they exist in a manner more excellent than any in which they do or can exist in themselves.”—

“The mysteries of our faith do not depend on human reason, but rest on the immutable foundations of truth. What! ask me to doubt of that which of all things is the most absolutely true? Faith is not an opinion formed in us by our laborious studies. It is an interior conviction, to which conscience bears its testimony. It is the basis of our reasonings, not their conclusion. It is no inference from our investigations, but is itself an absolute certainty.”

If to this teaching of St. Bernard any one had answered—that the innate ideas, which reflect in the human soul, as in a mirror, the eternal and immutable realities of the Divine intellect, (and especially such of those ideas as

relate to our faith as Christians,) are after all but so many individual revelations, which can be seen only by each man for himself, and which none can exhibit to his neighbour—his answer, as I infer from his habitual tone of thought, would have been, that the substantial coincidence or identity of such ideas in all regenerate men, is not without a clear and a conclusive attestation. He would have found such an attestation in that unity of sentiment and of belief, by which (as he insisted) the several members of the Catholic Church are held together, as one living body, animated by one all-informing soul—a union, the sacred harmony of which results from the concord of the innumerable strings vibrating in the spirits of each and of all of those whom it embraces.

I am very conscious that my feet are but too liable to stumble on such mountain-tops as I am treading, and that their atmosphere is too fine for my respiration. Nevertheless, I must request you to accompany me a few steps further on these giddy heights.

I have already said that Bernard was prepared by maternal tenderness for that philosophy—the philosophy of Love—which he adopted in his more mature years. To make that general statement intelligible, I must touch, though most briefly, on topics the sanctity of which I might but too probably violate if I presumed to dwell on them at any greater length. I would observe, then, that he found a *Summa Theologiæ* in the sublime declaration, that “the pure in heart shall see God.” He judged that, when so admitted to the sight of Him who is at once Light and Love, the pure in heart would derive from that beatific vision such an insight into all truth, and so ardent a thirst for perfect conformity to the Divine image, that casting aside, while still denizens of earth, the crutches of human investigation, and the thralldom of human passions, they would soar, as on the wings of eagles, into those celestial regions, where knowledge is intuitive, and love

and wisdom are the very\* elements of life. Kindling with some such conceptions as these, St. Bernard selected the Book of Canticles as the theme of his most celebrated, though (I suppose) his least intelligible work.

To us of this age and country, who know man only in his social state, and have no personal experience of him in his cloistered condition, the visions which thus peopled the brain of the great St. Bernard may perhaps appear but as so many phantasms; or as air-bubbles, reflecting gorgeous colours for the amusement of the child who has inflated them. I will not undertake to assert their substantial value, but I am well convinced that even the day-dreams of such a man are entitled to our reverence and tenderness, and that some knowledge of them is essential to a correct understanding of the growth and progress of philosophical literature in France.

An anchorite is almost of necessity a mystic, that is, one who habitually infers the objective from the subjective; or, in plainer words, one who assumes the existence of realities without him, corresponding with the most cherished of the visionary thoughts within him. The mind, cut off from the common duties, interests, and affections of life, wedded to an emaciated, and enervated, and therefore irritable body, and continually driven inward for occupation, creates for itself substitutes for the external objects amongst which others live, and readily glides into the belief that its own figments are so many innate ideas — types of actual entities — creatures of a divine original, and of an eternal and immutable existence. To the prisoner of the convent these deliriums may be as innocuous as they are pleasant; to the denizens of the wide world they are neither the one nor the other.

St. Bernard was pre-eminently a mystic, nor does the term convey any reproach. It is, indeed, ascribed to him, and to the other ascetic heroes and heroines of his age, in the most recent panegyrics of the most eloquent and

learned of existing Roman Catholic biographers. In what sense that eulogium is bestowed, and is to be understood, may be best explained by referring to the writings in which the most renowned of all his monastic contemporaries has developed the mysteries of those transcendental doctrines — so far, at least, as they can be intelligibly revealed in the language in use among uninspired men.

In the age of Bernard, there was living at the monastery of Boppard, near Bingen, a lady who has since been immortalised, under the name of Sainte Hildegarde. His interpretation of the promise, that “the pure in heart shall see God,” is supposed by the hagiologists to have received in her its most complete accomplishment. During his mission to raise champions of the Cross in Germany, he visited her at her convent, and they ever afterwards lived in the habitual interchange of letters with each other. The subjects, and the nature of that correspondence, may be learnt from his published epistles, or from the *acta sanctorum* of the Bollandists, or from any of the many histories of her life which her admirers have given to the world; or, better still, from the books in which she communicated to others the awful disclosures from on high, which she believed to have been made to herself.

From these sources it is to be collected that, in the third year of her life, Hildegarde first became conscious of a brilliant light, which, being at once material and spiritual, radiated through her body, until it had reached and illuminated her soul. These beams, which, of course, were of heavenly origin, reappeared to her at frequent intervals during the next fourscore years. And surpassingly wonderful was their influence. They imparted to her, as she devoutly believed, a perfect comprehension of all the Holy Scriptures, and rendered transparent to her the mysteries which those sacred books but darkly intimate to others. Discerning, in the mirror of her own mind, many of the eternal and immutable ideas of the Divine intellect,



she was enabled to perceive what are the corresponding forms, and what the analogous laws, by which this mundane system is pervaded and governed. The primitive matter of which all things material are composed, was laid bare to her in its elementary state. The soul of man, becoming the object of her spiritualised sense, was discovered to be "a celestial harmony." The awful attributes and ineffable nature of the Blessed Virgin became to Hildegard the subject of immediate consciousness. Ascending to the eternal and perennial fountains of life, she surveyed the operations of the creative energy. Descending to this lower world, she beheld, unrolled before her, the future history, and the ultimate destination, of our race, and especially the reign of Antichrist, and the ultimate triumph of the Church, which is at once Catholic and Roman.

If Ste. Hildegard were now living amongst us, who would be so cruel as to disturb her hallucinations, who so idle as to listen to them? But mental nosology was a science neither understood nor studied in the 12th century. At that time, Bernard, the greatest of the canonised doctors whom the Church of Rome can claim as peculiarly her own (for the Fathers of the first five centuries belong to the Church Universal), hailed and revered the revelations of the prophetess as if she had been another Miriam. "They are not," he said, "the work of man, nor will any man be able to understand them, whose soul love has not restored to the Divine image and likeness." "They who ascribe these visions to demoniacal suggestions, prove that they have no deep acquaintance with heavenly contemplations."

Nor was this the judgment of Bernard alone. During no less than three successive months, the books of Hildegard engaged the attention of a synod convened by Eugenius at Treves. The Fathers assembled there concurred in the opinions of the Abbot of Clairvaux; and Eugenius, in an autograph letter, exhorted her "diligently

to cherish in her heart the grace which God had lavished upon her ; but never to divulge, without extreme circumspection, what that Divine grace might prompt her to say." Nor was this all. No less than three other infallible popes, Anastasius IV., Adrian IV., and Alexander III., who succeeded Eugenius on the papal throne, each in his turn gave his sanction to the reveries of Ste. Hildegarde.

If these legends should appear to you too puerile for any serious notice, or too remote from our present subject to be noticed on this occasion, I answer that the mysticism which they illustrate was really pregnant with the most important results, both speculative and practical. In speculation, it was at once the fruit and the root of Bernard's doctrine of Realism. In practice, it was the too prolific germ of those relentless persecutions which have left their sanguinary stain upon almost every page of the annals of the Church of Rome.

Assume that the State, as the minister of the Church, has power enough to terrify into silence and submission all dissenters from the established creed, and then three steps only are wanting to perfect the theory of persecution. The first, that the dominant Church is infallibly right ; the second, that the imputed error is fatal to the souls of those who hold it ; the third, that the heretic dissents not from weakness or error of judgment, but from depravity of will. Now Realism, and Mysticism its offspring, supply each of those steps.

For if, as Bernard taught, faith is the basis, not the conclusion, of our reasonings ; and if that basis be itself laid in legible characters, engraven indelibly by the Creator on the souls of his rational creature man, then every one who can read those characters is infallible, so far at least as they accompany and conduct him. And if, on comparing those characters with the imputed heresy, he finds that the collision between the two is direct, and that it

takes place in the highest regions of these divinely inspired ideas, then the fatal tendency of it is demonstrated. And, inasmuch as the dissenter can be prevented from discerning in his own mind the same sacred indications of truth only by that blindness which is the result and the punishment of his carnal or worldly pollutions, his dissent is not error, but guilt; and the remedy for it is not argument, but the stake. Thus the acceptance by popes and doctors of the incoherent rhapsodies of an illiterate old woman, as evidences of so many innate ideas, reflecting the eternal verities of the Divine intellect, closed the door to all reasoning with those who rejected their creed, or any part of it. The believers and the dissenters had no common premises on which to argue. To the imputed heretics, the reflections on the mental mirror of Ste. Hildegard were but as so many delirious scrawls on the prison walls of a lunatic. To her patrons they were as authoritative as the handwriting on the palace wall of Belshazzar.

Bernard himself, it is true, though a realist, and therefore a mystic, was not a persecutor. His too successful efforts for the destruction of the followers of the False Prophet, whatever may be the censure due to him on account of them, had nothing in common with the guilt of his brethren of Citeaux, of St. Dominic, and of Innocent III., in their crusade against the Albigenses. Had he lived till then, I fear that his principles must have conducted him to a full participation in those crimes. But he was a wise and a holy man, whose hourly prayer not to be "led into temptation" was not offered in vain.

I cannot claim such an acquaintance with him, as he is exhibited in his own books, as to be able to offer any general criticism upon them. But I know enough of them to understand why, in France, the land of eloquence, so high, if not indeed the very highest, place has been assigned to the eloquence of Bernard. The opinion, or, perhaps, I should rather say the conjecture, which I venture

to hazard on his writings is, that they are such as could proceed only from a man whose whole existence had become one prolonged alternation of study and of devotion, who never ceased to worship except to write, and never laid down his pen except to pray. Whenever he descends from the mountain to speak to men, the Shekinah is visible on his countenance. It is, I believe, for this reason chiefly, though not exclusively, that every section of the Universal Church has ever rendered him the homage which usually each reserves for its own heroical men, and for them alone. The testimonies of Protestants in his favour might be drawn from all the countless divisions and subdivisions of the Protestant world. It is enough to refer to the two greatest of the leaders of the "insurrection against the spiritual despotism of the sacerdotal order." Luther says of Bernard, that "*omnes doctores vincit*;" and Calvin, that "*ita loquitur ut veritas ipsa loqui videatur*."

No similar veneration has ever waited on the name and memory of Abélard. The sentence which has been passed upon him by posterity may have been severe, but it is now irreversible. For some passages of his life no defence is possible; nor shall I make myself the apologist for much of what he has written. But to the charge that he was the founder of the Rationalistic system in modern Europe it may, I think, be well answered, that the reproach is too indefinite to convey any precise meaning, or to admit of any distinct refutation.

A Rationalist is usually censured as one who gratifies the pride of our common nature, by subjecting all doctrines, those of revelation not excepted, to the scrutiny and judgment of his understanding; and by making his own reason the standard of truth, or at least, of his own appreciation of truth. That such pride mingles with most of our thoughts, and therefore with the thoughts of those

who are usually condemned as Rationalists, no one will probably deny. But the same rebuke may, I think, be addressed with equal, or perhaps with greater, force to most of their antagonists. The exultation of Bernard and his adherents, for example, in contemplating themselves as so many living depositaries of the reflected ideas of the Creator, was probably more haughty, as it was certainly more unfounded, than the exultation of Abélard and his disciples, in contemplating themselves as the depositaries of a power, by the right use of which divine truth might be interpreted or discovered. There is a pride of belief, as well as a pride of investigation; and I know not which of the two passions is the more unruly.

Neither can I perceive that Abélard erred in thinking, that, by the constitution of our nature, each man's reason is, and must be, to himself the ultimate judge of truth. That such is the province of our reason is, indeed, most impressively, though unconsciously, admitted in every attempt to disprove it. If you encounter such Rationalism as this by argument, you are appealing to the very reason which it is the object of your argument to silence and dethrone. The stake is the only consistent and practicable refutation of the imputed error.

But, on the other hand, that Rationalism which conducted Abélard, as it has conducted so many others, to the conclusion that human reason is not merely the *judge* of truth, but is also the one *guide* to truth, seems to me not only a dangerous, but a fatal mistake.

His text, as we have seen, was, "Dubitando ad inquisitionem venimus, inquirendo veritatem percipimus." I dissent from each of those positions.

First. "Dubitando ad inquisitionem venimus" is an apophthegm, in deference to which many of the greatest intellects in France, as I shall hereafter have occasion to show, have brought their minds into what is called "a state of provisional doubt;" and great is the glory which

they have won by this achievement. To myself no boast appears more unjust or unmeaning.

Faith, not doubt, is the indispensable condition, and the law, of our existence. Life begins with credulity; and, to the close of life, an implicit trust in the opinions of others is the lot, not merely of the unlearned many, but, to a very great extent, of the most learned amongst the instructed few. The wisest of the children of men have ever held, and must ever hold, the vast majority of their most important convictions, not on inquiry, but on trust.

The true doctrine I take to be rather, "*Credendo ad inquisitionem venimus.*" You must take a multitude of things for granted, if you would know any thing to the purpose. The child assumes the knowledge and veracity of his parents. The pupil reposes the same credit in his preceptor. The philosopher relies on the reports of the experimentalist, and the statesman on the calculations of the statician. Nay, the Divine teacher of all truth amongst men—He who was Himself the impersonation of wisdom—taught that obedience is the path to knowledge; and that we must do the will of our Maker, in order to know of the doctrine; or, in other words, that we must not provisionally question, but provisionally assume, the authority of our best accessible instructor, in order that we may subsequently verify or correct that assumption by the experience to which it will conduct us.

Neither can I subscribe to the "*Inquirendo veritatem percipimus,*" without large qualifications. Inquiry conducts us, not so much to truth itself, as to the best teachers of truth. Life is not long enough, the human mind is not capacious enough, to enable any man to build up a complete system of knowledge and belief by his own investigations. The Author of our being has not left his creature man, with his feeble powers and his short span of life, to grope out, by his own isolated studies, those truths which it most concerns him to reach and to hold firmly. It is

not by our own researches that we attain to truth in what concerns our health of body, or our individual, or our social, interests. In those matters our inquiries do but conduct us to the best attainable guides, and place us under their direction. The case is not essentially otherwise when we are investigating the great problems of our actual condition in this life, and of our prospects beyond it.

I have thus ventured, and certainly in no forgetfulness of the seeming presumption of the attempt, to indicate what I suppose to be the errors of the realist and mystic Bernard on the one hand, and of the nominalist and rationalistic Abélard on the other. I have done so because, in the metaphysical style of the modern French language, they were the earliest "expressions," in their native country, of the two great antagonistic principles by which, from their days to our own, it has been distracted. These are the principle of faith and the principle of reason. Names and forms have, indeed, passed away. Realism and Nominalism are no longer the inscriptions on the banners of the contending hosts. But that abstruse metaphysical debate, however hidden under new modes of speech, still lies at the root of this immortal controversy. The innate ideas of Des Cartes, the mysterious doctrines of Kant (so far as I have any information respecting them), and Mr. Coleridge's much cherished distinction of the pure reason and the practical understanding, were but so many republications of the Realism of St. Bernard. At the close of the incomparable essay with which M. Cousin has introduced his publication of the *Ouvrages Inédits d'Abélard*, the works to which I gladly acknowledge myself to be indebted for all that I know on the subject of his doctrines,) occurs a passage which explains, with so much beauty and exactness, the permanent importance of the debate on which I have been dwelling, that I cannot better terminate this lecture than by attempting to lay it before you in our

own language, so far at least as it is in my power to find any equivalents in English for his refined, and almost Platonic, phraseology.

“A problem (says M. Cousin) which might seem scarcely worthy to be made the subject even of a philosophical reverie, gave birth to different metaphysical systems. Those systems agitated the schools, and, at first, the schools only. Ere long they passed from the province of metaphysics into that of religion, and from religion they advanced into the region of politics. Then, taking their place on the historical stage, they interposed in the events of the world, agitated councils, and afforded occupation to kings. William the Conqueror is summoned into the field by the English clergy against the nominalist Roscelin; and Louis VII. becomes the president of the synod in which Bernard, the hero of the age, denounces the conceptionist Abélard, himself the teacher of Arnaud of Brescia. All this is, however, but a prelude. Time runs its course. Conceptionism, which, during nearly two centuries, has cherished Nominalism in its bosom, at length sets its charge at liberty; and then this new consequence, or rather this renewed consequence, of the same fundamental principle, finding the times more favourable, appears with a far different lustre, and excites tempests never encountered till then. Occam (a new Roscelin), by once more applying Nominalism to theology, and so to politics, checks the power of the Pope, engages a king and an emperor in his quarrel, and sheltering himself against the lightnings of Rome under the wings of the imperial eagle, is able to say to the head of the empire, with no unbecoming pride, ‘Tu me defende gladio: ego te defendam calamo.’ Abandoned by the king of France, but aided by the emperor of Germany, the indomitable Franciscan, escaping from the dungeon of Roger Bacon, dies in exile at Munich. But he has been a teacher at Paris—that prolific soil in which no seeds which have once been committed to it are ever



permitted to perish. The University of Paris embraces the proscribed doctrine. Nominalism, triumphant, diffuses the spirit of independence. That new spirit gives birth to the Councils of Constance and of Basle, where appeared the great Nominalists, Peter d'Ailly and John Gerson — those Fathers of the Gallican Church — those sage Reformers, whose voices are unheeded, and who are, ere long, replaced by *that other Nominalist called Luther*. It were well, therefore, not to be so very facetious on the subject of metaphysics; for metaphysics embrace at once the original principles, and the ultimate principles, of all things."

## LECTURE XIX.

## ON THE POWER OF THE PEN IN FRANCE.

EMINENT as was the place of Gerbert, of Bernard, and of Abélard, in the literature of France, yet, in their days, French literature was still unborn. Neither the theologians, nor the chroniclers, who plied their pens in the Benedictine monasteries, nor the Troubadours, who practised their gay science in the Provençal courts of love, made use of that language which in our own days is vernacular in their native country. Latin in its various forms, classical, scholastic, colloquial, and rustic, was their only instrument of communication with their own or future ages; and, for this reason, neither the holy unction of the Abbot of Clairvaux, nor the philosophical acumen of his great rival, nor the songs or romances which once charmed the court of Toulouse, ever retained any permanent hold on the hearts, or on the memories, of the men of later times.

The earliest writers to whom that glory belongs are those who, having been present either as actors or as spectators at the great military achievements of their age

and nation, recorded them in narratives in which the styles appropriate to chronicle, to history, and to memoirs, are confounded, or rather are harmonised with each other. Of that class of writers, three only retain, and probably they alone deserve, at this day the admiration which greeted them in their own, — I refer to Joinville, to Froissart, and to Philippe de Comines.

It is not the least of the glories of the reign of St. Louis, that it produced the first fruits of that abundant harvest of glory, which was to be gathered in by writers, in his own native tongue, in each generation succeeding to his own. Our acknowledgment of the wealth and abundance of that harvest should be made with no niggard hand, or grudging spirit. For if the extent to which the intellectual labours of any people are diffused and welcomed beyond the limits of their own territory and language, is the best criterion of their excellence (and I know of none less doubtful), we must concede to the great authors of France a pre-eminence above those of any other country in modern Europe. Be that, however, as it may, I at present refer to the influence which they have exercised in the remotest parts of the civilised world, as affording us some indication of the authority which they have possessed at home, — some measure of that domestic power of the pen, on the right use or abuse of which so much of their good or evil fortunes, as a nation, has been dependent. To understand the workings of that power is to understand not merely the great writers of France, but the people, also, for whom they wrote.

In that country, as in every other, the authority of men of letters has always consisted in the exactness with which they have succeeded in reflecting in their books the better and more enduring aspects of the character of their nation. They must be the interpreters of the habitual state of mind of those for whom they write, or they must write in vain. They must give utterance to thoughts,

which their less gifted readers would have uttered if they could. They must bring into the light ideas which, when clothed by them in appropriate terms, others will recognise, or will suppose themselves to recognise, as so many conceptions which, in inchoate and immature forms, were already struggling for birth in their own minds. It is by means of such services, and of such illusions as these, that, in each generation, the foremost understandings make willing captives of the multitude, and, if they be true to their high calling, mould them into docile and obedient pupils. The action and reaction of the literature and of the national character of any people upon each other, is the true subject of their moral and intellectual history.

It is especially so with regard to France. Nowhere else have books and men borne so intimate a relation to each other. Whoever has much studied their books must be of a sluggish imagination, if he has not seen the land and its inhabitants with his mental eye, even before he has actually visited them. Not only their dramatists, their novelists, and their memoir-writers, but their divines, philosophers, moralists, and historians, are ever drawing from the life. The *Misanthrope*, or the *Memoirs of St. Simon*, are not more absolutely French than the *Essays of Montaigne*, or the *Discourses of Massillon*. The *La Fleur* of Sterne is not so thoroughly a Frenchman as Montesquieu. From the literary works, grave and gay, of the French people, which lie in such profusion before us, we may perhaps, therefore, be able to infer something of the spirit of the land for which they were composed, and of the influence of that spirit on the authors of them.

First, then, every one who is at all conversant with the great writers of France will, I believe, be prompt to acknowledge their superiority to all other European writers, and especially to our own, in the art, or the power, of perspicuity. Compare, for example, the language of Montaigne, of Pascal, of Bossuet, or of Montesquieu,

with the style of Hooker, or Milton, or Jeremy Taylor, or Clarendon. How limpid the flow, how clear and logical the sequences of the French, — how involved, inverted, parenthetical, and obscure the stately march of the English composition. In the Ecclesiastical Polity, in the Areopagitica, in the Liberty of Prophesying, or in the History of the Rebellion, how few are the periods which fully convey their meaning, until they have been broken up by the student into their elementary sentences. In the Essays of Montaigne, or in the Provincial Letters, or in the Histoire des Variations, or in the Esprit des Lois, how laboriously must the reader search for so much as a single example of involution, inversion, or parenthesis? I express no opinion on the comparative excellence either of the two schools, or of their respective canons of criticism. I confine myself to the remark, that, in this competition of the giants, the palm of habitually expressing the most profound thoughts in the most simple and intelligible forms of speech, must be awarded not to England but to France.

And such as are the giants in either host, such also, in their measure, are the innumerable dwarfs in each. In later times, indeed, the common herd of writers in both nations have affected a sort of *chiaro-scuro*; the convenient shelter for meagreness of thought and poverty of invention. For this degeneracy we however are, I fear, far more deeply responsible than our neighbours. Darkened as the literary language of France has so often been by the fumes of undigested metaphysics, there is no author, and scarcely any reader there, who would not stand aghast at the introduction into his native tongue of that inorganic language which even Samuel Taylor Coleridge himself tumbled out in some of his more elaborate speculations, and with which the imitators of that great man are at this day distorting and Germanising the speech of our progenitors.

Now, as we are to infer from the style peculiar to France some of the distinguishing characteristics of the national mind, what are those distinctive qualities of the French people which have prescribed clearness and precision as the first and fundamental law of the good or tolerable composition among them? I answer, first, that, in that law, we have a proof of the genial, sympathetic, and communicative spirit which is their inalienable birth-right. The cloud-compelling Jupiter shrouded himself in darkness, because he dwelt in an abstracted and silent solitude. But the God of day rejoiced in the light, because he was also the God of eloquence. Even so a German will so often write obscurely, because his pleasure is in secluded rumination. A Frenchman always writes clearly, because his happiness is in social and intellectual intercourse. The first calls up shadowy dreams not less with his pen than with his pipe. The other is engaged in the commerce of thought in his study, not less than in the salon. And hence the immeasurable superiority of the French to all other nations in social literature. What can be compared with the ease, the grace, the fascinating flow of their familiar letters? except perhaps their historical memoirs, which are, indeed, but another kind of familiar letters, addressed to society at large, by actors in the scene of public life, who have gladly escaped from its caution and reserve to enjoy the freedom of colloquial intercourse.

But such advantages are purchased at a price. The propensity and the power thus to render literature subservient to the embellishment of life, are continually tending to a fatal abuse. Recall the long series of men of genius, from Rabelais to Voltaire, who, becoming the victims of their own arts of fascination, have so often debased history, philosophy, and religion itself, to a frivolous pastime; the idle resource of the habitually idle. Remember how Bayle postpones everything else to the

amusement of his readers; how Montesquieu strews the *Esprit des Lois* with epigrams; and how even the illustrious Pascal illuminates the most awful of all discussions with the charms of his inimitable irony. Conjecture (for it is hopeless to measure) the dimensions of those pyramids of contes, novels, romances, fictitious memoirs, comedies, and vaudevilles, which the pens of French men and women have piled up with such a prodigality of labour and of talent; and then confess that, if the passion to captivate, and to be captivated, has rendered the style of France pellucid, it has also contributed not a little to render much of her literature frivolous.

The exquisite perspicuity of the French written language is further the indication of the predominance in the French mind of the reasoning faculty; of that faculty which, with truth for its object, and logic for its guide, strives to fathom all the depths, and to scale all the heights, of human knowledge; and, therefore, wages an inappassable war against all the powers of mental darkness. The most subtle of analysts, the Frenchman dissects his ideas into their component parts with a touch at once so delicate and so firm, as almost to justify his exulting comparison of his own vocabulary with that of Athens. The most perspicuous of experimentalists, he explores with the keenest glance all the phenomena from which his conclusions are to be derived. The most precise of logicians, he reasons from such premises with the most undiscoloured mental vision. The most aspiring of theorists, he fixes an eagle gaze on the highest eminences of thought, and passes from one mountain-top of speculation to another, with a vigour and an ease peculiar to himself. And hence it has happened, that the writers of France have become either the teachers, or the interpreters, of science and of philosophy to the world at large — that their civil jurisprudence forms the most simple and comprehensive of all existing codes of law — and that their historians,

their moralists, and their poets breathe freely in a transcendental atmosphere, too rare and attenuated to sustain the intellectual life of grosser minds than theirs.

And as their luminousness of style results from clearness of conception, and that clearness of conception from logical exactness, so that logical exactness, combining with the social spirit of the people, has rendered them the greatest of all modern masters in the art of rhetoric. For eloquence is well defined as "ignited logic;" and to the French speaker, logic supplies the fuel, and a genial sympathy the flame, of eloquence. The sermons of the pulpits of France, the éloges of her academies, the discourses of her judges, the debates of her States General, of her parliaments, and of her legislative assemblies; nay, even the declamations of her revolutionary clubs, all attest that, in every age, and in every theatre, her orators have been gifted with admirable powers of agitating and subduing the wills of the crowds which have gathered round them.

But this logical structure of the understanding of our neighbours, while at once generating their characteristic perspicuity of style, and attested by it, has also given birth to that remorseless *Ergoisme* (no language but their own could have found place for such a word), by which they are no less distinguished. The helpless slaves of the syllogism, they advance with unflinching intrepidity to any consequence, however startling, which seems to them legitimately to emerge from whatever they regard as well established premises; while they reject, with equal hardihood, any doctrine, however invaluable, which cannot be so demonstrated. They are rationalists in the correct sense of that much misused expression. That is, they are more than sceptical of all conclusions which unaided reason cannot reach, even though they may be reached by the aid of those guides, of which reason herself has taught the need, and the authority. They condemn, as unmeaning or superstitious, every opinion which cannot be



enounced in terms perfectly unambiguous, even when such opinions are conversant with opies beyond the range of human observation and of man's experience. He who would estimate the extent to which such Pyrrhonism infects and degrades much of the literature of France, must pass a large part of his life in reading books, the knowledge of which a good man would regret, and a wise and humble man avoid.

In that invariable transparency of style in which the sense of all eminent French writers is conveyed to us, we may, I think, further discover the ancient, and even yet unsubdued, propensity of their nation and of themselves, to submit to established authority. In a jargon as new as it is offensive, the sacred right of insurrection has, indeed, been loudly proclaimed in our own days. But, from the days of Hugues Capet to those of Louis XVI., it was at once the pride and the habit of the French people to bow to law, or to the semblance of law, with an almost oriental subserviency. This national docility was the basis on which the Capetien kings, and the literary dictators of France, alike erected their absolute dominion. Hence that subordination of the individual characteristics of French writers to the generic characteristics of French literature. Hence it is that, in their external forms, history, poetry, philosophy, and even romance, ever correspond in France to certain elementary types, which the law of letters there has prescribed; and that, like so many crystals, each species is cast in its own normal mould, while all the species exhibit the same invariable transparency. The humblest writer for the tragic stage still works upon the model of the *Cid* or *Athalie*. The remembrance of the *Misanthrope*, or *Les Joueurs*, restrains him who would impart a new demeanour to comedy. Every new philosopher must imitate the method of *Des Cartes*; and *Bourdaloue*, to this moment, gives the law to all the pulpits of Paris.

That this conformity of the literature of France to the established canons of French criticism rescues the inferior artists from much extravagance and from many deformities, cannot be disputed; though it may, not unreasonably, be questioned, whether this advantage is not purchased at too dear a rate. For that docility, and the transparent clearness of style to which all candidates for fame aspire as the one indispensable condition of success, indicate, if they do not also promote, the prevailing absence of the higher powers of the imagination. The Ossianic hero, whose dwelling is in the shadows and the mists, is haunted by spectres which are at once his terror, his delight, and his inspiration. As he draws nearer to the south, he quits them for objects more definite in form, more bright in colouring, but of far less power to agitate his bosom, or to kindle his enthusiasm. So in those sunny latitudes of thought, in which the French intellect finds its habitual and favourite abode, though there be neither clouds to overcast, nor vapours to obscure, the prospect, yet neither are there to be found those magical illusions which impart to more sombre skies their deep and mysterious significance. Though France herself denies, yet all other nations with one voice proclaim, her inferiority to her rivals in poetry and romance, and in all the other elevated fields of fiction. A French Dante, or Michael Angelo, or Cervantes, or Murillo, or Goethe, or Shakspeare, or Milton, we at once perceive to be a mere anomaly; a supposition which may indeed be proposed in terms, but which in reality is inconceivable and impossible.

I trust that I shall not appear to have been seduced, by these more alluring topics, from my proposed and proper inquiry into the influence of the literature of France upon her civil polity. The first, and most essential, step towards the solution of that problem is to determine by what peculiarities that literature is characterised. The second, is to estimate (in however brief and cursory a manner) the

genius of each of those illustrious men who have left upon the national mind the indelible impress of their imperishable labours. If (as I observed in my last lecture) we can attain to some just appreciation of those patriarchal spirits, we shall understand their less gifted descendants, sufficiently, at least, for the purpose which I have immediately in view; for the hereditary resemblance, or the indispensable imitation, may, as I have formerly stated, be traced with little difficulty from the intellectual ancestor throughout the whole of his intellectual lineage. To this attempt, I will, therefore, now address myself.

Joinville, the son of the Sénéchal of Champagne, was born near the commencement of the 13th century, and was educated at the courts of Troyes and Provins; where, at that time, minstrelsy and music rendered the homage in which greatness delights, while they received, in turn, the homage which genius demands. Joinville listened to those strains and probably applauded them; for he writes as a worshipper of the harmonious and the beautiful; but he did not imitate them. Having succeeded to the Sénéchaussée of Champagne, he became esquire carver to Saint Louis, and, at his summons, joined that ill fated host which divided, with their royal leader, all the calamities of his Egyptian campaign and of his inactive exile in the Holy Land. But the enthusiasm of loyalty in Joinville, though sustained by dreams of an oriental principality, proved less enduring than the enthusiasm of religion in St. Louis, sustained, as it was, by the unfaltering hope of an eternal recompense. The Sénéchal, therefore, declined to accompany his master in his expedition to Tunis; but, in the reign of Louis X., and at the age of more than ninety, dictated to an amanuensis the story, which he had doubtless often told before to his associates, of his friendship, his conversations, and his campaigns with the canonised king. That story has survived to our own days, as a cherished part of the intellectual patrimony of the French people. In those pages the gallant and affec-

tionate, but worldly minded, knight, and the magnanimous, pensive, and unworldly king are so skilfully contrasted, and the virtues and infirmities of each are so reflected and relieved by the other, that no one can contemplate them in that exquisite, though unlaboured, composition without understanding and admiring, without condemning and forgiving and loving them both. Over the whole picture the genial spirit of France glows with all the natural warmth which we seek in vain among the dry bones of the earlier chroniclers. Without the use of any didactic forms of speech, Joinville teaches the highest of all wisdom — the wisdom of love. Without the pedantry of the schools, he occasionally exhibits an eager thirst for knowledge, and a graceful facility of imparting it, which attest that he is of the lineage of the great father of history, and of those modern historians who have taken Herodotus for their model.

At the distance of eighty-six years from the completion of the Memorials of Joinville, appeared the yet more popular Chronicles of Froissart. The son of an heraldic painter, and born at Valenciennes, he was familiar from his childhood with the emblems of seigniorial dignity, and with the martial achievements on the French and Flemish frontiers. He became, however, not a soldier, but a priest; and then (such were the habits of his times) obtained distinction as a writer of erotic poetry. His verses appear to have recommended him to the favour of Philippa of Hainault, the Queen of Edward III., and, by her bounty, he was enabled to travel through France and England, where (as he says) he met with more than two hundred great princes, and collected intelligence on all sides. For Froissart was the first of those French authors who have followed literature as their chief and peculiar calling. The earlier chroniclers had been either the narrators of what they had seen, or the transcribers or abbreviators of what they had read. He, on the other hand, made it the business of his life

to gather, from the captains or the princes of his age, the materials for the commemoration of their exploits. Such information could not of course be so collected and employed, without some sacrifice of historical fidelity. But if he is sometimes unjust in the distribution of praise or blame, he is perfectly accurate in the delineation of the world in which he lived. He is not the apologist, but the enthusiast, of the age of chivalry. He does not exaggerate its virtues, for he could conceive of none more exalted ; nor does he cancel its faults, for he was blind to their deformity.

For the task which he had undertaken he was qualified, not only by his restless activity and zeal, but by a retentive memory, a luminous understanding, a creative fancy, and an absolute exemption from all national prejudices. For though the Duke of Burgundy was the superior lord, and the king of France the suzerain, of his native city, yet Froissart considered himself neither as a Burgundian nor as a Frenchman, but as the subject of the Count of Namur, the immediate superior of Valenciennes. He wrote, therefore, not as a partisan, but as a cosmopolite. He also wrote, not as a philosopher, but as a painter of the great military spectacle of his age, in all its shifting aspects, in all its brilliant colours, and in all its ceaseless variety ; and on that canvass he had the genius to group all the chivalry and the heroism, — all the battles and the sieges, — all the fêtes and the tournaments of that agitated period, each in a mellow light, each in its due subordination to the rest, and each with a breadth of touch, and a truth of perspective, which redeems that vast array of figures, and that boundless complexity of action, from the reproach of confusion or disorder. In the art of picturesque writing, Froissart is not only without an equal, but without a competitor. In the art of narrative he has been surpassed by many, though even in his narration the spirit of his native land may be distinguished in the clearness and the natural sequence of his story, in the graceful adjustment of the

several parts of it to each other, in the absence both of tumour in his pathetic passages, and of exaggeration in his historical incidents, and in the easy and unostentatious structure of the language in which his chronicle is composed.

He is, however, only a chronicler. Philippe de Comines is the earliest writer in the French tongue, who was entitled to assume the loftier title of an historian. Froissart had depicted great events; De Comines delineated great men. The one had contemplated the strife of kings and kingdoms as a spectator of the Isthmian games may have gazed at that heart-stirring spectacle. The other had watched the schemes of statesmen and the conflict of nations with some approach to that judicial serenity which we ascribe to a member of the Amphictyonic Council. Yet De Comines can hardly be said to have been an impartial judge between the princes who successively enjoyed his aid and his allegiance. He regards Charles the Rash with that affectionate interest which the heroism even of the unwise will excite in the bosoms of the wisest. He contemplates Louis XI. with that combination of curiosity, of attachment, and of awe, which minds of more than ordinary power so often cherish for each other. The images of the fiery duke and of the crafty king were projected in bold relief in the imagination of this acute and vigilant observer, and the truth and distinctness of those images forms the great charm of his retrospect of his own eventful life. The higher charm of a just sensibility, whether to moral beauty or to the absence of it, is, however, wanting in his pages. Whether we study the successive masters of De Comines, as described by him, or himself, as incidentally portrayed in his delineation of those remarkable persons, we are reminded that both they and he were living in an age when Machiavelli was the teacher of princes, and when he numbered among his disciples, not only Louis of France, but our own Richard III.,

and the houses of Borgia and of the Medici. Profound and sagacious as he was, De Comines could neither serve such a sovereign, nor breathe the moral atmosphere of such times, with impunity. He is the unqualified admirer, if not the unscrupulous apologist, of his royal master; and seems insensible alike to the injustice of the ends at which he aimed, and to the baseness of the means by which he pursued them. Yet man is not less inconsistent in his faults and errors than in his virtues; and thus, even the utilitarian De Comines is unable to survey the revolutions in which he so largely participated, without an occasional, and apparently a heartfelt, acknowledgment that, in bringing to pass the disastrous catastrophe of the world's history, the will and the agency of man are but instruments by which the Divine will accomplishes its immutable purposes of wisdom and of justice. In the subtlety of his analysis of the great characters of his generation,—in the force and discrimination of his portraits of them,—in the sagacity with which he explores, and the perspicuity with which he interprets, the hidden causes of the events in which they acted,—and in his vigorous dispersion of the mists with which ignorance or passion obscures the true aspects of human affairs, De Comines is emphatically a Frenchman. In the reverence with which, on reaching the impassable limits of human investigation, he ceases to inquire, and pauses to adore, he rises higher still, and becomes, not only a citizen, but a teacher of the great Christian commonwealth.

This great triumvirate of French literature before the Reformation (Joinville, Froissart, and De Comines) were not more exempt than their contemporaries from the bondage of Papal Rome. With the fall of spiritual freedom had fallen also the freedom of the intellect. As religion, which is the love of God and of man, had been darkened by superstition; so philosophy, which is the

knowledge of God and of man, had been buried under the dialectics of the school. The students of the middle ages had been thus inexorably debarred from those boundless fields of inquiry into the origin, the nature, the duties, and the destination of our race, in which the sages of Greece, and the fathers of the Church, had consumed their laborious lives. All moral truths had passed into so many articles of the faith. All articles of faith had been reduced into so many dogmatic formulas, and all those formulas had the syllogism for their common basis. To multiply such formulas by the multiplication of such syllogisms, was the single exercise left open to inventive minds; and to minds not inventive it was permitted only to accept, to remember, and to repeat those peremptory conclusions of the schoolmen. The great end and object of their teaching was to convert the human mind into an intellectual mechanism, by which the same or similar consequences would infallibly, and at all times, be reproduced from the same established premises. And while to satisfy that craving for general principles, which is the indestructible instinct of our nature, the Church of Rome thus employed her array of doctors, seraphic and irrefragable; she also employed the scourge, the prison, and the brand, to silence those who presumed to quench that sacred thirst, by ascending for themselves to the fountains of truth which God has opened, both in the Book of Life and in his unwritten revelations in the human heart. For these reasons it is that Joinville and Froissart skim so lightly, though so gracefully, over the surface of the great social movements which they record; and that even De Comines makes no attempt to draw any solution of the great problems lying in his path, from those depths with which the theology and the philosophy of later times have rendered our modern historians even ostentatiously familiar.

With the revival of letters, a mighty change came over



the spirit of the literature of France. The first and immediate effect, indeed, was to provoke a rapturous and extravagant imitation of the Greek and Latin models. Grey-headed men went to school to study Cicero and Homer. To satisfy the demand for such knowledge, Henry Stephen and Erasmus became, at once, writers and compositors for the press. Athenian and Roman costumes fluttered through the streets and the salons of Paris. A Macedonian phalanx was enrolled out of the French army; and, at the approach of death, learned men imitated the dying declamations of Cato and Antoninus.

But then came the Reformation, not only to sweep away these follies, but also to dispel many other errors far more formidable than these. The alliance between Christian antiquity and Pagan antiquity triumphed over the fictitious traditions of the Church, and the oscillating logic of the School. The Decretals of Isidore, and the *Summa Theologiæ* of St. Thomas Aquinas, retreated into the limbo of dethroned and departed idols. The human mind once more breathed freely, and men of genius appeared to give utterance to the thoughts and feelings of an emancipated world.

I almost hesitate to pronounce, in immediate juxtaposition, the names of the second great literary triumvirate, who, in the 16th century, assumed that high office in France. Yet it is, I think, but an apparent paradox to assert, that between Rabelais, Calvin, and Montaigne, the parallelisms are as remarkable as the contradictions.

Rabelais, the son of an innkeeper at Chinon, was born at that place in the year 1483. He became a Franciscan friar, a deacon, and a priest in holy orders; and then, at the mature age of forty-two, commenced the study of medicine in the college of Montpellier. Various medical treatises were the fruit of those labours; and the reputation derived from them was sufficient to obtain for him the office of physician to the public hospital at Lyons.

But his professional books proving unsaleable, Rabelais, to indemnify his bookseller, wrote and published his *Pantagruel*, or *Chronique Gargantua*, of which (as he says) more copies were sold in two months than of the Bible in ten years. Having thus discovered the secret of his power, he next produced the *Gargantua*; the work which has secured for him the admiration of all subsequent ages, though the reverence of none. It is a romance in which Rabelais may be considered as depicting the habits, opinions, errors, crimes, and follies of that age of religious and intellectual revolutions, in the centre of which he lived. Yet the critics have doubted, and must ever continue to doubt — whether *Gargantua* and his son *Pantagruel* are actual portraits of those who led the armaments (literary, theological, or military) of those times, or are mere impersonations of those abstract qualities by which the world was then governed — whether *Panurge* and *Friar John* had any living prototypes amongst the men of the 16th century — or whether the one is but a name for mediocrity, ceasing to be honest as it becomes conspicuous; and the other a name for sensuality, rescued from contempt by a shrewd and jovial spirit. But why investigate these and such other riddles, proposed by their author in avowed defiance of any such attempt? Why, indeed, read at all a book of which not only the general scope, but almost every page, is enigmatical? Why squander time and patience on a writer who, of set purpose, makes his readers dependent on the guidance of some dull and doubtful commentator? I have no answer to these questions, or can answer them only by very earnestly dissuading the perusal of the lives of *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*. For those passages which do reward the toil of the student are separated from each other, not only by this profound obscure, but by foul abysses of impurity, which no skill or caution can always succeed in over-leaping. I know not how to describe them in terms

at once accurate and decorous, except by borrowing Mr. Carlyle's denunciation of a work of Diderot's, and saying with him, or in words resembling his, that he who, even undesignedly, shall come into contact with these parts of Rabelais' great work, should forthwith plunge into running waters, and regard himself, for the rest of the day, as something more than ceremonially unclean.

Yet he whose business, or whose determination, it is to appreciate aright the civil, and therefore the literary, history of France, must needs pay this heavy price of knowledge. For, in that history, the romance of Gargantua is an indispensable link. From the revival of heathen antiquity, Rabelais had gathered a mass of learning resembling the diet of his own Pantagruel, who had 4,600 cows milked every morning for his breakfast. From the revival of Christian antiquity, he had learnt to despise the authority and the superstitions of the Church of Rome; without, at the same time, learning to reverence the authority and the doctrines of the Gospel. He thus traversed the boundless expanse of human knowledge, without the chart or compass which may be discovered only in that knowledge which is not human, but divine. He traversed it under the guidance of his own wit, sagacity, and humour; a wit, vaulting, at a bound, from the arctic to the antarctic poles of thought; a sagacity embracing all the higher questions of man's social existence, and many of the deeper problems of his moral constitution; and a humour which fairly baffles all attempts to analyse or to describe it. For it was the result, not of natural temperament alone, but also of the most assiduous and severe studies. The language of Greece had become as familiar to him as his mother-tongue; and, while he learnt from Galen and Hippocrates to investigate the properties of living or of inert matter, he was trained, by Plato, to spiritual meditation, and by Lucian to a scepticism and a buffoonery, alike audacious and unintermitted. From the

union of such a disposition and of such discipline, emerged the strange phenomenon of a philosopher in his revels. In contemplating it one knows not, as it has been well said, "whether to wonder most that such wisdom should ever assume the mask of folly, or that such folly should permit the growth and development of any true wisdom." It is, however, an apparent, rather than a real, difficulty. The wisdom is never sublime, and the folly but seldom abject. Each is but a different aspect of a nature, of which the parts are, indeed, inharmonious, but not incompatible — of a genuine epicurean gifted with gigantic powers, but of cold affections, and of debased appetites; ever worshipping and obeying his one idol, Pleasure, though at one time she bids him soar to the empyrean, and at another commands him to wallow in the sty.

Rabelais was wise in the sense in which any man may be so who delights in the strenuous exercise of a powerful understanding, and loves thinking for thinking's sake. He was wise to detect popular fallacies, and to discern unpopular truths. He was wise to see how the young might be better educated, laws better made, nations better governed, wars more vigorously conducted, and peace more securely maintained. He was wise to call down both theology and philosophy from the skies above to the earth beneath us. And he was not more wise than eloquent; sometimes arraying truth in the noblest forms of speech, though more frequently enhancing her beauty by enveloping and contrasting her with the homeliest. At his prolific touch his native tongue germinated into countless new varieties of expression; and the mines of wealth, both intellectual and verbal, which he bequeathed to future ages, after being wrought by multitudes in each, still appear inexhaustible.

The wisdom of Rabelais was, however, of the world, worldly. It never ascended to the eternal fountains of light, nor descended to illuminate the dark places of the

earth. It neither sought to interpret the awful mysteries of our nature, nor bowed down to adore in the contemplation of them. It aimed at no exalted ends, nor did it ever lead the way through any rugged and self-denying paths. It expressed neither sympathy for the wretchedness, nor pity for the sorrows, of mankind; but was satisfied to be shrewd, and witty, and comical upon them all. To the keen gaze of Rabelais, the frauds and follies, and ignorance, and licentiousness, of the papal court and priesthood afforded endless matter of scorn and merriment; but to his last hour he lived in their outward garb and communion. To that penetrating eye had been clearly revealed the majesty of the truth which the Reformers taught, and the majesty of the sufferings which they endured in its defence; but not one glow of enthusiasm could they ever kindle in his bosom, as they toiled in indigence, and died in martyrdom, to evangelise the world. Secure in the absolution of Clement VII. for whatever he had done and written against the Church, and secure in the licence of Francis I. to publish whatever else he might please, Rabelais delighted to assume the character of a chartered libertine, or, as it might almost be said, of an intellectual debauchee. And yet, voluptuary, scoffer, and sceptic as he was, his laughter was so hearty, his glee so natural, his frolic so riotous, and his buffoonery so irresistible, that he became, not merely the tolerated, but the favoured and privileged Momus of his times. He became also a proof to all later times, that, by the great mass of mankind, anything will be forgiven or permitted to genius, when, abandoning its native supremacy, it condescends to undertake the strangely inappropriate office of master of the revels.

In thus dwelling on the literary career of Rabelais, my object, however, has chiefly been to show how it illustrates the predominance, in all the great authors of France, of the same essential characteristics. His possession and

abuse of their logical spirit conducted him to scepticism, if not to infidelity. His possession and abuse of their sympathetic spirit immersed him in a ceaseless bacchanalian riot. Deep and fatal are the traces of his example and of his fame in the literary history of his native land. With him commences the lineage of those eminent spirits who have waged war in France against the moral and religious convictions, and even against the social decencies of the Christian world; a war productive of some of the sorest troubles, or rather, let us say, of some of the heaviest chastisements, which have rebuked the offences of the nations of modern Europe.

If it were my object to show how contrarieties are related, I know not how I could better accomplish it than by the immediate transition, which my subject compels me to make, from Francis Rabelais to John Calvin; for, probably, no two men of commanding minds were ever more curiously contrasted with each other, as certainly no two minds were ever enshrined in bodies more dissimilar. To look upon, Rabelais was a drunken Silenus, Calvin a famished Ugolino. The one emptied his bottle before he wrote, while he was writing, and after he had written; the other contented himself with a repast of bread and water once in each six-and-thirty hours. Reposing in his easy chair, the merry doctor was hailed as lord of misrule by all the jovial spirits of his age; enthroned in the consistory of Geneva, the inexorable divine was dreaded as the disciplinarian of himself and of the whole subject city. The witty physician was L'Allegro, the austere minister Il Penseroso, of their generation. The reader of the *Gargantua* yields by turns to disgust, to admiration, and to merriment; but Democritus himself would not have found matter for one passing smile throughout the whole of the Christian Institutes. To Rabelais, human life appeared a farce as broad as the *Knights of Aristophanes*; to Calvin, a tragedy more dismal than the

Agamemnon of Æschylus. And as they wrote, so they also lived. The traditional stories about Rabelais, if true, attest his love, and, even if untrue, they attest his reputed love, of that kind of wit which is called practical ; all the traditions of Calvin represent him as a man at whose appearance mirth instantly took flight. The gay doctor is made in these tales to play off his tricks on the graduates in medicine, on the Chancellor du Prât, on the king and queen of France, and even on the mule of the pope himself ; while the solemn theologian makes his domiciliary visits to ascertain that no dinner table at Geneva was rendered the pretext for levity of discourse, or for excess of diet.

What, then, is the congruity on which to found any comparison between these most incongruous minds ? The answer is (to borrow the word once more), that they were both devoted *ergoists*, each of them being at once a mighty master, and a submissive slave, of logic. To what strange extravagances it conducted or accompanied Rabelais, I have already attempted to show ; the consequences to which it impelled Calvin were of far deeper significance.

The great Saxon patriarch of the Reformation had known neither the same mastery nor the same bondage. From the inspired volume, indeed, Luther had deduced the doctrines of the churches destined to bear his name. But as his meditations on it led him further and further from the tenets and usages of the Church of Rome, he paused. He had been borne onwards till he came in sight of conclusions against which his heart reclaimed, and of practices against which his conscience protested. At the bidding of those remonstrances, he was content to be inconclusive, if not illogical. He had left no errors unassailed, but was content to leave many truths undecided. He had drawn from his Bible, principles, the more remote consequences of which he did not attempt to draw. He had learnt many lessons of tolerance and some of indifference ; and, if he were now living amongst us, would

hardly escape being stigmatised as a latitudinarian for that dislike of religious dogmatism, and that disregard of the varieties of external observances in public worship, which marked his declining years.

Most dissimilar were the spirit and the conduct of John Calvin. Before him, also, lay the inspired volume. He looked on it as containing, not merely the chief, but rather the only, premises from which the truths of Christianity could be either learnt or inferred. While he was composing his great work, Luther was still alive. But they who are, or who claim to be, most familiar with his writings assert, that no mention of the German Reformer occurs in any part of them. If so, this remarkable silence may probably be referred, partly to the self-complacent nationality and contempt for the foreigner, so common to almost all French writers; but still more to his determination to traverse the vast ocean of theology, unaided by the charts of any preceding navigator. He seems to have adopted the Baconian apophthegm, that "from any one truth all truth may be inferred;" but with the addition, that these all-embracing inferences must be drawn by no other hand than that of John Calvin himself. There is something even sublime in the courage with which his unaverted eye confronts every difficulty, however formidable, and contemplates every consequence, however repulsive. Without presuming to hazard any opinion on the truth of his peculiar system, and not even pretending to understand it aright, I can yet perceive, that, from his apparent meaning, any less intrepid logician than himself must have turned aside with many painful misgivings. Yet I so much distrust my own ability to exhibit an exact summary of his doctrines, that, declining any such attempt, I shall entirely rely on the construction which they have usually received, and shall state, without affirming, the charges against him. He not only advances from the great article of justification by faith alone to a denial of the



ground on which the necessity of a holy life had been maintained by the Roman Church, but is said to place that necessity on grounds alike insecure and unintelligible. He is said to deduce from that article, the opinion that penitence is impossible to the unregenerate, and useless to the elect. He is said to ascribe to the Holy Scriptures the doctrine of an absolute fatalism. He is said to discover in them the revelation of the awful dogma, that He who "is love" has called into being a large part of the race of man, foredoomed, by His own immutable decree, to an eternal existence of hopeless misery. He is said to interpret the word of God as teaching that the Church and the State are not two bodies, in alliance with, or distinct from, each other, but the same body, one and indivisible; and that, therefore, all legitimate human government is, in effect, a theocracy. He found, or supposed himself to find, in his Bible, that episcopacy was a human, a needless, or an injurious invention, — that holy orders could not be effectually transmitted from one generation of Christian ministers to another, — that the baptismal font was superfluous, — the use of unleavened bread in the holy eucharist superstitious, — the reverence of that sacrament as a divine mystery, to a great extent, a mere human figment, — the festivals of the Church an abuse, — and her ancient ceremonies an unmeaning pantomime. Thus taking away the support which feeble man demands under the burden of a pure and absolute spiritualism, he stood erect and triumphant amidst the wreck of the ecclesiastical opinions, institutions, and observances of bygone ages; but not of ecclesiastical opinions alone. Under his guidance, and by a still further use of his remorseless logic, the secular commonwealth, also, was shaken to its foundations. Geneva became the cradle of revolt against half the monarchies of Europe; and, under the various names of Presbyterians, Insurgents, Gueux, Huguenots, and Puritans, his disciples in Scotland, in the United Provinces, in France, and in

England, proved their fidelity to the political doctrines, and even to the example, of the great founder of Calvinism.

If it were admitted that all the links of Calvin's argumentation were as indissoluble as he supposed them to be, it would still remain to inquire, whether his opinions are not refuted by the nature of the inferences with which they were thus pregnant. For the reasoning faculty is not the only light, nor is it even the surest of the lights, given to man for his guidance amidst the shadows which encircle him. We accept the conclusions of our reason, because the laws and structure of our nature render it inevitable. We accept the assurances of our moral instincts for the very same reason. But there can be no conflicting necessities. There is, indeed, no meaning in any such words. "Never yet did nature say one thing, and reason say another." Those voices are in eternal harmony, though to us they may occasionally seem at discord. When such a seeming dissonance arises, a wise man will consider whether it is not more probable that his syllogisms are vulnerable, than that his heart misinterprets the law written on it by God himself. In the strength of our instincts, He has graciously provided a compensation for the weakness of our intellects. The best reasoned is not always the most reasonable conclusion; and when, from any logical conclusion, the soul and conscience recoil, we may well believe that there is some real, though latent, error, either in the basis on which we have argued, or the superstructure of argument which we have erected upon it.

Calvin admitted no such belief. He took no security against the illusions of logic. He vindicated the tyranny of reason over each man, and of the reason of John Calvin over all men. And they who, like him, are by their birth-right the intellectual sovereigns of our race, have ever been greeted by the subject multitude with applause, or rather with exultation, even when their lawful authority has passed into a lawless despotism. His Institution

Chrétienne was, therefore, received with unbounded delight. We may, indeed, reject the story, that a thousand editions of it were sold in his own lifetime; but we cannot dispute that, during a century and a half, it exercised an unrivalled supremacy over a large part of Protestant Europe. For that dominion it was indebted, in part, to the novelty and comprehensiveness of the design it accomplished, — to the vast compass of learning, scriptural, patristic, and historical, which it embraced, — to the depth and the height of the morality which it inculcated, — and to the calm but energetic keenness with which it exposed the errors of his adversaries. But the popularity and the influence of this remarkable book, is also, in part, to be ascribed to its literary merits. Calvin has been described as the Bossuet of his age. Of all the French writers whom France had as yet produced, he was the most philosophical when he speculated, the most sublime when he adored, the most methodical and luminous in the development of truth, the most acute in the refutation of error, and the most obedient to that law or spirit of his nation, which demands symmetry in the proportions, harmony in the details, and concert in all the parts of every work of art, whether it be wrought by the pen, the pencil, or the chisel. In the ninth chapter of Bossuet's *Histoire des Variations* may, indeed, be found the best, as it is a very reluctant, eulogy on the literary excellence of his great rival and predecessor. Even in the haughty gloom which the Bishop of Meaux discovers in the style and tone of the reformer of Geneva, there is a not inappropriate interest. The beautiful lake of that city, and the mountains which encircle it, lay before his eyes as he wrote; but they are said to have suggested to his fancy no images, and to have drawn from his pen not so much as one transient allusion. With his mental vision ever directed to that melancholy view of the state and prospects of our race, which he had discovered in the Book of Life, it would,

indeed, have been incongruous to have turned aside to depict any of those glorious aspects of the creative benignity which were spread around him in the Book of Nature. Whatever else may have been the merits of the Calvinistic system, it, at least, failed to impart elasticity to the spirits, or freedom to the thoughts of those who first embraced it. After the rise and fall of a few generations, it even failed to retain them within the precincts of evangelical truth, and the doctrines of Socinus at length superseded those of Calvin, not only in New England, in France, and in Switzerland, but even in his own Geneva. On a future occasion I may, perhaps, attempt to show how this degeneracy had its root in the despotic logic of the founder of those churches. My more immediate purpose is to trace out the progress of that despotism in the literature of his native country.

As in most other tyrannies, so in this, the immediate effect of the servitude into which Calvin had subdued the minds of his disciples was to provoke a formidable revolt. When he was giving his latest touches to his *Institution Chrétienne*, Michel de Montaigne, then in his twenty-second year, had just taken his seat in the Parliament of Bourdeaux. That he afterwards became a deputy in the States General of Blois, though maintained by no inconsiderable authorities, seems to me impossible; but it is clear that his early manhood was devoted to public, and especially to judicial, affairs. He was thus brought into contact with the busy world at the moment of a greater agitation of human society than had occurred since the overthrow of the Roman empire. Marvellous revolutions, and discoveries still more marvellous, in the world of letters, of politics, of geography, and of religion, — the warfare of inappeasable passions, — the working of whatever is most base, and of whatever is most sublime, in our common nature, — and calamities which might seem to have fulfilled the most awful of the apocalyptic visions,

had passed in rapid succession before the eyes of this acute and curious observer. It was an unwelcome and repulsive spectacle. He turned from it to seek the shelter and the repose of his hereditary mansion. In that retirement he indulged, or cherished, a spirit inflexibly opposed to the spirit by which his native country was convulsed. The age was idolatrous of novelties ; and, therefore, Montaigne lived in the retrospect of a remote antiquity. It was an age of restless ambition ; and, therefore, he passively committed himself and his fortunes to the current of events. The minds of other men were exploring the foundations, and criticising the superstructure, of every social polity ; and, therefore, his mind was averted altogether from the affairs of the commonwealth. Because his neighbours yielded themselves to every gust of passion, he must be passionless. Because the times were treacherous, he must punctiliously cherish his personal honour. Because they were inhuman, he cultivated all the amenities of life. Because calamities swept over the world, he was enamoured of epicurean ease. Heroism was the boast of not a few, and to their virtues he paid the homage of an incredulous obeisance. Dogmatism was the habit of very many ; and, therefore, Montaigne must surrender himself to an almost universal scepticism.

The contrast was as captivating as it was complete. With a temper easily satisfied, — with affections as tranquil as they were kindly, — with a curiosity ever wakeful, but never impetuous, — with competency, health, friends, books, and leisure, Montaigne had all the means of happiness which can be brought within the reach of those to whom life is not a self-denying existence, but a pleasant pastime. Yet, with him, it was the pastime of an active, enlightened, and amiable, mind. The study of man as a member of society was his chosen pursuit, but he conducted it in a mode altogether his own. The individual man, Michel Montaigne, such as he would be in every

imaginable relation and office of society, was the subject of his daily investigation. He became, of all egotists, the most pleasant, versatile, and comprehensive. He produced complete sketches of himself with an air of the most unreserved frankness, and in a tone frequently passing from quiet seriousness to graceful badinage. He describes his tastes, his humours, his opinions, his frailties, his pursuits, and his associates, with the most exuberant fertility of invention, and has wrought out a general delineation of our common humanity from the profound knowledge of a single member of it. And, as the variety is boundless, so is the unity well sustained. His essays are a mirror in which every reader sees his own image reflected, but in which he also sees the image of Montaigne reflecting it. There he is, ever changing, and yet ever the same. He looks on the world with a calm indifference, which would be repulsive were it not corrected by his benevolent curiosity about its history and its prospects. He has not one malignant feeling about him, except it be towards the tiresome, and especially towards such of them as provoke his yawns and his resentment by misplaced and by commonplace wisdom. He has a quick relish for pleasure, but with a preference for such pleasures as are social, inoffensive, and easily procured. He has a love for virtue, but chiefly, if not exclusively, when she exacts no great effort, nor any considerable sacrifice. He loves his fellow-men, but does not much, or seriously, esteem them. He loves study and meditation, but stipulates that they shall expose him to no disagreeable fatigue. He cherishes every temper which makes life pass sociably and pleasantly. He takes things as he finds them in perfect good humour, makes the best of them all, and never burdens his mind with virtuous indignation, unattainable hopes, or profitless regrets. In short, as exhibited in his own self-portraiture, he is an Epicurean, who knows how to make his better

dispositions tributary to his comfort, and also knows how to prevent his evil tempers from troubling his repose.

The picture of himself, which Montaigne thus holds up to his readers as a representation of themselves, is not sublime, nor is it beautiful; but it is a striking and a masterly likeness. It is drawn with inimitable grace and freedom, and with the most transparent perspicuity; and they who are best entitled to pronounce such a judgment, admire in his language a richness and a curious felicity, unknown to any preceding French writers. Even they to whom his tongue is not native, can perceive that his style is the easy, the luminous, and the flexible vehicle of his thoughts, and never degenerates into a mere apology for the want of thought; and that his imagination, without ever disfiguring his ideas, however abstract, and however subtle they may be, habitually clothes them with the noblest forms, and the most appropriate colouring.

But my more immediate object is, to notice the relation in which Montaigne stands to the other great moral teachers of his native land, and to those habits of thought by which France is, and has so long been, characterised. The antagonist in everything of the spirit of his times, he seems to have regarded with peculiar aversion the peremptory confidence by which the great controversy of his age was conducted, both by the adherents of Rome, and by the founder of Calvinism. Because they would admit no doubt whatever, every form of doubt found harbour with him. Because they were dogmatists, he must be a sceptic.

In M. Faugère's recent edition of Pascal's Thoughts, will be found the famous dialogue on the scepticism of Montaigne, between Pascal and De Sacy,—a delineation so exquisite, that it seems mere folly to attempt any addition to it. The genius of Port Royal, however, exhibits there its severity, not less than its justice; and a few words may not be misplaced in the attempt to mitigate a little of the rigour of the condemnation. Montaigne was

a sceptic (as very many are), because his sagacity and diligence were buoyant enough to raise his mind to the clouds which float over our heads, but were not buoyant enough to elevate him to the pure regions of light which lie beyond them. His learning was various rather than recondite. It was drawn chiefly from Latin authors, and from the Latin authors of a degenerating age; not from Cicero or Virgil, but from Seneca and Pliny. Of Greek he knew but little, though he was profoundly conversant with the translation of Plutarch, with which Amyot had lately rendered all French readers familiar. From such masters Montaigne did not learn, and could not have learnt, the love of truth. They taught him rather to content himself with loose historical gossip, and with half formed notions in philosophy. They taught him not how to resolve, but how to amuse himself with, the great problems of human existence. They encouraged his characteristic want of seriousness and earnestness of purpose. From such studies, and from the events of his life and times, he learnt to flutter over the surface of things, and to traverse the whole world of moral, religious, and political inquiry, without finding, and without seeking, a resting-place. His aimless curiosity and versatile caprice form at once the fascination and the vice of his writings, though not indeed their only vice. In this presence I am bound to add the warning, that the name of Montaigne belongs to that melancholy roll of the great French sceptical writers — Rabelais, Montesquieu, Bayle, Voltaire, and Diderot,— who, not content to assault the principles of virtue, have so far debased themselves, as laboriously to stimulate the disorderly appetites of their readers.

Yet the scepticism of Montaigne was not altogether such as theirs is. He has none of their dissolute revelry in confounding the distinctions of truth and falsehood, of good and evil. He does not, like some of them, delight in the darkness with which he believes the mind of man



to be hopelessly enveloped. He rather placidly and contentedly acquiesces in the conviction that truth is beyond his reach. He could amuse himself with doubt, and play with it. With few positive and no dearly cherished opinions, he had no ardour for any opinion, and had not the slightest desire to make proselytes to his own Pyrrhonism. He was, on the contrary, to the last degree, tolerant of dissent from his own judgment; and, in the lack of other opponents, was prompt, and even glad, to contradict himself. Of all human infirmities, dulness, and obscurity, and vehemence, are those from which he was most exempt. Of all human passions, the zeal which fires the bosom of a missionary is that from which he was the most remote. We associate with him as one of the most pleasant of all our illustrious companions, and quit him as one of the least impressive of all our eminent instructors. Into what new forms his sceptical and his social spirit passed in the age next succeeding his own, will be the subject of the lecture which I hope to address to you when we next meet.

## LECTURE XX.

## ON THE POWER OF THE PEN IN FRANCE.

IN my last lecture I observed how Rabelais (the earliest of the three dominant intellects of France in the 16th century) found endless matter for the broadest mirth in the mysteries of our mortal existence; — how Calvin derived from Holy Writ the peremptory solution of them all; — and how Montaigne amused himself with the inquiry, whether such questions were really susceptible of any answer whatever? To that inquiry, his friend, disciple, and imitator, Francis Charron, devoted his once celebrated Treatise on Wisdom. Montaigne had played with the problem, “*Que sais-je ?*” and had inscribed it as a motto on the scales he kept by him. Charron inscribed not only on his book, but on the portals of his house at Condom, the words, “*Je ne sçai.*” The torch which had thus been passed from hand to hand was at length grasped by René Des Cartes — a genius who, in profound, intense, and persevering thought, surpassed Calvin himself, and rose above Rabelais and Montaigne in the expansion of his mind, still more than he fell below them in wit, and grace, and playfulness.

Des Cartes (the son of a councillor in the Parliament of Rennes) was born at La Haye, in Touraine, in the year 1596. As a volunteer at the siege of La Rochelle, and afterwards in the army commanded by Prince Maurice in Holland, he studied the passions of man as developed in their wildest excitement; and then travelled far and long to observe the manners and the prevalent opinions of the various nations of Europe. In one of these journeys, finding himself (as he informs us) in a wild and sequestered scene on the frontiers of Bavaria, he spent the whole day in a sunny nook, passing from thought to thought till he had at last conceived the desire of reducing his mind to a state of absolute nakedness, in which, divested of all his former ideas and affections, he might retain nothing except the will and the power to investigate truth. This singular wish was as singularly accomplished. He began by inhabiting, in the midst of Paris, a hermitage so inaccessible, that his friends could never discover it; until, after passing two years in that retirement, he became convinced that the Parisian air was possessed by a subtle poison, disposing him to vain and chimerical imaginations. From these intellectual miasmata he therefore escaped to the town of Egmont, in Holland, and resided there during the next twenty-five years in a state of unbroken meditation, solitude, and repose. The University of Utrecht at length, by preferring against him the charge of atheism, drove him once more to Paris as a place of shelter. But at Paris, also, he sought security in vain, and was compelled to accept from Queen Christina, the welcome which both his adopted and his native countries had refused him. He died shortly after his arrival in Sweden, a victim to that severe and ungenial climate.

Of the fifty-four years which Des Cartes thus passed on earth, more than thirty were spent in a state of self-abnegation such as no anchorite has ever emulated. It was little that his sleep, and diet, and exercise were

exactly regulated by the single purpose of securing, to the utmost possible extent, the independence of his soul on his body. His mental appetites were subjugated to a still more rigid discipline. To secure to his reason an undisputed supremacy over all his other faculties, he laboured, not only to cast down every idol of the cavern, but to consign to oblivion all the interests, the sentiments, and the events, with which either his heart, or his imagination, had ever been occupied. He even attempted to emancipate himself from the memory of those deceptive languages, Greek and Latin, in which such subtle disguises have been found for so many mental illusions. That he might ascend to the sanctuary of truth, he thus aspired to become a pure abstraction of defæcated intellect.

The result of this sublime and persevering effort was to give birth to the Cartesian philosophy, which has so long exercised, and which even yet retains, so powerful an influence over the minds of the educated classes of society in France. The explanation of that celebrated system falls within the province of other teachers in the university. I shall attempt only to notice one or two of its elementary principles; and I shall do so in the fewest possible words, because I am well aware that no words of mine, however multiplied, could render intelligible to my audience doctrines which I myself understand so very imperfectly.

"*Cogito, ergo sum*," is the massive foundation-stone of the colossal edifice erected by Des Cartes. That famous proposition, though really "the well ripened fruit of long delay," may perhaps sound not only as a truism, but as of all truisms the most meagre. Such a judgment would, however, prove nothing except the ignorance and incompetency of the judge.

"I think, therefore I exist," is not the fragment of a syllogism which might be reconstructed thus,—"*Whatever*

thinks, exists. But I think. Therefore, I exist." It is rather an enthymeme — that is, an immediate sequence of two propositions, of which the second is the necessary offspring of the first. "I think,"— that is, I am conscious of the act of thinking. Myself and my thoughts are a plurality, not a unity. *They* are the objects of which *I* am the subject. My consciousness of them is my adjudication that such objects exist. Or suppose that I can doubt even the existence of my own thoughts. Well, even so; that very doubt is itself a thought of which I am conscious. Let my scepticism be so absolute, and so universal, as to involve in uncertainty every other conceivable position, yet that very scepticism is the affirmation of myself as a thinking being.

Here then the naked Reason has at length set her foot upon one resting-place, narrow if you will, but yet firm and immovable. Here is one truth which cannot be assailed even by doubt itself; or, rather, here is a truth which doubt itself does but verify and confirm. Nor is this a barren position. It is rather a ground which, when duly cultivated, is prolific of results of the highest moment to every thinking being.

For, first, it ascertains the fact that, to each man, his own consciousness is the primary evidence and the ultimate test of truth. But each man is conscious of many ideas, and each man, who is accustomed to meditate on the subject, becomes aware that his ideas are separable into two classes, distinguished from each other by the difference of the sources in which they originate. One class of our ideas we derive from the testimony of our senses, and from the reflections we make on that testimony. All our ideas of this class are more or less fallacious, because they all partake of the infirmities of our bodily organs, and of the weakness of our mental powers. Our ideas of the other class do *not* originate with our senses, because they do not correspond with anything presented

to our notice in the exterior world. They are, therefore, a part of our very existence, and are coeval with it,—not, indeed, actively, but potentially,—not as thoughts already developed, but as pregnant germs of thought, to be awakened from their slumber, and to be ripened into maturity, in the progress of our lives. The first of these classes of ideas may be called *Factitious*, the second *Innate*.

Now, amongst our ideas, there is one which challenges peculiar attention. It represents to us a Being self-existent, infinite, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, supremely holy, just, and true, and absolutely perfect. To the object of that idea we give the name of God. But in the world of sensible things, nothing exists corresponding with this idea, nor anything, from our meditations on which, we could have derived it. Consequently it belongs, not to the class of our *factitious*, but to the class of our *innate*, ideas.

But if my idea of God be an innate idea, it must have been, potentially at least and as yet an undeveloped germ, a part of my very original existence, and coeval with it. My existence and my idea of God must, therefore, both have sprung from the same *fontal* source. What, then, is that source?

First. My existence, and my coeval idea of God, did not originate with myself. If I really had the power and the will to call myself into being, which is of all powers the most eminent, I must also have had the inferior power and the will to clothe myself with all the perfections embraced in my innate idea of God. But I am invested with no approach to any one of those perfections.

Secondly. My existence, and my coeval idea of God, did not originate with my progenitors. For, if they really called me into being, they must also have called into existence my innate idea of God; that is, they must have infused into me a type of perfection infinitely transcending

any prototype residing in themselves. They must have produced an effect with which the producing cause was not in the slightest degree commensurate.

Thirdly. My existence, and my coeval idea of God, did not originate in the concurrence of a plurality of causes; for, on that supposition, plurality, which is imperfection, called into being my idea of the Divine Unity, which is perfection.

It follows that the origin of my existence, and of my idea of God, must be a cause distinct from myself and from my progenitors — must be a cause possessing the attribute of unity — and must be a cause invested with all other qualities of self-existence, infinity, omniscience, and the like, which that idea embraces. But such qualities can exist only as the forms of some substance. That substance must be a living, conscious, personal Being; and to that Being we assign the name of Deity.

See then the naked Reason setting her foot upon a second rock; a resting-place, not contracted and narrow like the first, but sufficiently broad and stable to sustain the superincumbent weight of all divine and of all human knowledge. Man's consciousness of his own thoughts has demonstrated his own existence. Man's consciousness of his own innate idea of God has demonstrated the existence of a Deity, in whom every attribute of wisdom, power, and goodness meet in absolute perfection.

Now, of those perfections, truth is one; for the opposite of truth, that is falsehood, and error, are imperfect. If, then, He who is the source of my being, and of my innate ideas, be true, those ideas must themselves be true; that is, there must exist some objective realities of which they are the types. As God is the cause of those ideas, so must He also be the substance of them. They are the marks of the great Architect indelibly impressed upon his workmanship, man.

Behold, then, the third conquest attained by the pure

and naked Reason. In the innate ideas of the human mind she has acquired a mirror which represents to her, with infallible accuracy, many of the otherwise inscrutable secrets of the material and immaterial universe.

Advancing from this basis *Des Cartes* next proceeds to inquire into the relations between the Creator and his creation, between the body and the soul, between mind and matter. He teaches, if I mistake not (and I am deeply conscious of my liability to mistake), that between things spiritual and things material there is really nothing in common ; that between the immortality of the one and the decays and dissolution of the other there is really no contradiction ; that as created things remove further and further from their source, they become more and more multiplied, diverse, and dissimilar ; but that the Divine Unity is the common basis of them all ; that science is but the path by which we return to that unity ; that it is a continually progressive generalisation — the constant discovery of new harmonies, and reconciliation of seeming differences, until at length the whole universe shall be revealed as under the rule of some few laws — and those laws as dependent on God — and God himself as the common centre of all, as one in every form and species of unity, the single fountain of universal life.

To determine how that divine causation acts and what it is, and how far that which we call cause and effect has any analogy with the creative power and its results, *Des Cartes* moves onward into a complete system of psychology, founded on and illustrated by other systems, physiological and physical. I do not presume to follow his awful guidance, but descending to a level more befitting both my capacity, my knowledge, and my office, I would attempt briefly to consider, What was the influence, in France, of the Cartesian philosophy, of which such were the first or elementary principles ?

Two systems of thought, the most singularly contrasted



with each other, presented themselves to Des Cartes, as he looked back on the generations immediately preceding his own. The first was the Scholastic philosophy, which, enthralled both by premises and by conclusions which it was forbidden to all men to controvert, and by a logic from which it was forbidden to any to escape, performed, within these impassable limits, feats of mental agility almost as miraculous as they were useless. From this despotism of human authority, some of the great thinkers of Italy, of England, and of France had revolted into a scepticism, which denied or depreciated the power of man to attain to truth at all, either by the use of his reason, or by the aid of revelation. The Reformers themselves had contributed, however undesignedly, to foster this prevailing habit of mind, by subverting many of the established opinions, without being able to agree with each other as to the belief to be substituted for them.

But the noble intellect, and yet more noble spirit of Des Cartes, rejected alike this bondage of human authority, and the lawless anarchy by which it had been succeeded. Loving Truth with his whole soul, he sought her by the most rugged and untrodden paths. He accepted, indeed, the doubts of Montaigne and Charron, of Gassendi, and of Hobbes. But, in the judgment of his most eminent disciples, the unbelief, which with them was final, with him was provisional. To them it was a resting-place, to him a point of departure. He became a voluntary unbeliever only that he might attain to a settled faith; and divested himself of every preconceived thought, that so he might erect that superstructure of his more mature judgment, on the single basis which appeared to him unassailable by any just or even plausible objection. When addressing you on the subject of the "provisional doubts" of Abélard, I offered my opinion on the substantial worth and accuracy of such eulogies as these; and I now add, that the scepticism of Des Cartes, however up-

right, did not conduct him to the truth he sought. The system which he thus built up by the intense and solitary labours of more than twenty years, has long since been numbered among the things that were, and are not. It was not given to him to be the intellectual legislator of succeeding ages. But he achieved the yet higher glory of transmitting to all the generations which have followed his own, the indelible impress of his freedom of thought, of his reverence for truth, and of his fervent zeal for the propagation of it.

The earliest of the triumphs of Des Cartes are, however, rather amusing than serious, and are curiously characteristic of French society. The austere sage, or rather his books and his doctrines, became for a time eminently fashionable in Paris. Thus we find Madame de Sevigné persuading herself that the nieces of so great a man must excel all other ladies in a certain dance, which, in those days, all ladies were performing. Her inimitable letters bear frequent testimony to the popular use of Cartesian phraseology, as when she writes to her daughter, *J'aimerois fort à vous parler sur certains chapitres ; mais ce plaisir n'est pas à portée d'être espéré. En attendant, je pense, donc je suis ; je pense à vous avec tendresse, donc je vous suis ; je pense à vous uniquement de cette manière, donc je vous aime uniquement.*" The Fables of La Fontaine also illustrate the prevailing admiration, or, it might rather be said, the submissive worship, of the great teacher, whom he declares the Pagans would have adored as a god, and to whom (he adds) even we may assign a place midway between those beings who are merely human and those who are wholly spiritual. Fénelon reproduced the principles of Des Cartes with all the embellishments of his own graceful imagination ; and Bossuet himself, in his treatise, "*De la Connaissance de Dieu et de Soi-même,*" is supposed to be nothing more than the interpreter of some of the more considerable tenets of the Cartesian philosophy,

To explain the decrees of a power so capricious and arbitrary as Fashion, is a task which may be undertaken by none but those who have been initiated into her higher mysteries. It may, however, be conjectured, that the patrons of that kind of celebrity found a peculiar zest in bestowing it on one who stood so far aloof from their own glittering circle. Probably, also, they discovered in his style, a charm which the most enthusiastic might feel, however little they might be able to analyse it. For the language of Des Cartes resembles nothing more than the atmosphere, by the intervention of which we see, though it is itself invisible. It is the nearest possible approach to that inarticulate speech, in which disembodied spirits may be supposed to interchange their thoughts. It has no technical terms — no appeals to the memory — no colouring of imagination or of wit — no trope, or epigram, or antithesis — no rhetoric and no passion. And yet it wants neither warmth nor elegance. The warmth is perceptible in his evident and devout solicitude to attain to truth and to impart it. He writes not to exhibit his own powers, but to benefit his readers. In the words (I believe) of Pascal, "As you study the author you perceive the man." The elegance consists in the felicity and the ease with which each successive word, and sentence, and paragraph, and discussion falls into its proper place, and exactly fulfils its appropriate office. It is a language which may be compared to a perfect system of musical chords, which, being touched by some absolute master of the science of harmony, yields a strain at once the most complex in reality, and the most simple in appearance. La Place himself never writes under the restraint of a more severe logic. La Fontaine never tells a fable with a more perspicuous simplicity. "Les Précieuses Ridicules" of Molière, therefore, read and extolled Des Cartes in the sincere belief that they understood him. It was the most natural,\* though the most complete, of all mistakes. If

our own Butler could have borrowed his pen, the superficial many would have been as much fascinated by the Analogy as they were by the "Discours de la Méthode;" and (with all reverence be it added) the penetrating few would have better understood, as they would have still more profoundly revered, that imperishable monument of piety and of wisdom.

But to gratify the taste, and to win the applause, of the courtly or literary circles of the age of Louis XIV., was the least of the effects of the labours of Des Cartes. He is the founder in France of that habit of mind, which to this hour characterises her more eminent philosophers, and which they hold up to the admiration of mankind, under the distinguishing term of Spiritualism. On the soundness of these Neo-Platonic doctrines I do not presume to hazard an opinion. But it is risking little to say, that *he* did good service to his country who, by the undying authority of his name, has rescued it from the sensualism of Hobbes. To Des Cartes, more than to any other man, it is owing, that Physiology has never been allowed by the great philosophical teachers of France, or by their disciples, to usurp the province of Psychology, — that the soul is not believed by them to acquire and to digest her aliment, just as the body gathers and assimilates its food, — that they do not suppose the will, and all the other powers of the interior man, to be but so many parts of a thinking mechanism, obeying the immutable laws of mental dynamics, and destined at last to an inert inactivity, — that they discern in the relations of man to his Creator the still perceptible traces of the Divine image, in which our race was formed, and which, in the depths of its fall and degradation, it still retains, — and that they perceive, even in the economy and structure of the material universe, a wisdom which contemplates and provides for something more than merely material advantages.

Des Cartes is also the founder, among his fellow-country-

men, of "Rationalism," if that word be used in its inoffensive and better sense. Shortly before his birth, the rebound of the human mind from the fetters which had so long repressed its elasticity had been signalised by the appearance, in every part of Europe, of spirits struggling for freedom, and aspiring, as it has been beautifully said, to inhabit the palace of their own thoughts — the *edita, doctrinâ sapientum, templa serena*. But as yet these were but the aspirations of the nobler few. The less noble many were still bowing beneath their ancient servitude. It was in the boyhood of Des Cartes, that Bruno was burnt at Rome, and Vanini tortured at Toulouse. It was in the ripe manhood of Des Cartes, that the reluctant Galileo was compelled to admit the revolution of the sun round the earth. It was soon after Des Cartes had quitted the world, that Malebranche was still bemoaning the despotism which demanded of all men the sacrifice of their reason and their conscience to the Peripatetic faith. Yet in Malebranche, Des Cartes found his most eminent disciple, and in Leibnitz his most illustrious follower. To this hour, the Cartesian spirit is dominant in Germany, and the "Cogito, ergo sum," is the real basis of the hazardous speculations of her greatest philosophers.

For that spirit yet lives, though the forms to which it once gave life are for ever gone. It lives in those mental habits, so familiar to our own times, that we have almost forgotten that they are new, and have ceased to look back to their origin amongst us. Such is the habitual assertion of the right to discriminate between truth and falsehood, in opposition to any and to every human authority. Such is, also; the habit of bringing all such questions to the test of the universal, not of individual, reason. Such, again, is the rejection, in our speculative inquiries, of the treacherous aid of a philosophical terminology, and the rejection of the yet more dangerous support of great names, of ancient traditions, and of established maxims. And

such, above all the rest, is the habit of regarding the search for truth, and the propagation of truth, as the high duties to which the intellectual rulers of mankind are bound, when necessary, to sacrifice, not their ease merely, but fame itself, and every other recompense which the world could offer. Francis Bacon was not more the founder of such rationalism as this in England, than René Des Cartes was the founder of it in France.

Nor was he content to vindicate the rights of reason. He laboured, also, to determine and enforce her obligations. In Des Cartes, the characteristic logic of the French understanding attained its perfection, as, in his writings, it found its model. A teacher of dialectics might draw from every page of the "*Discours de la Méthode*," admirable examples of the right use of that science. So admirable, indeed, were they that, while Arnauld and Nicole followed their guidance in the "*Grammaire générale Raisonnée*," and in the "*Logique*" of Port Royal, the dramatists, and wits, and poets, as they laboured in the adjacent château of Versailles to amuse their royal patron, rendered an involuntary homage to their literary sovereign. They imitated the severe sequence of his argumentation, even when it was their immediate object to provoke a smile; and they aimed at his transcendental truths, while giving utterance to the anguish or the raptures of the heart.

The French critics, pledged as they are to discover the absolute perfection of dramatic genius in Corneille, Racine, and Molière—the consummation of wit and taste in Boileau—and the last refinement of graceful playfulness in La Fontaine—maintain, that the secret of the unrivalled beauty of them all consists in the sagacity with which they grasp universal truths, and in the precision with which they express them; or, in other words, in the Cartesian spirit by which they are animated. I know not how to concur in this eulogy. I can perceive, indeed,

in the poetry of the age of Louis XIV., this boasted power of reasoning; but I think that I, also, perceive that it is attained at the expense of the higher power of thinking. We have learnt, from our own poets and dramatists, to regard a yet more exalted office than this as their appropriate ministry. We require them to invent and to imagine — to detect the mysteries of the heart — to kindle and to control the affections — and to render the beautiful and the sublime, the pathetic and the ludicrous, suggestive of truth sometimes familiar, and sometimes recondite. The Cartesian philosophy, and the logical exactness of their French rivals, is like a cold sub-soil, stunting and starving the vegetation of the well cultured surface. Thus their heroines not seldom pause to deliver a subtle analysis of the passions by which we are to suppose them devoured. Thus, also, the most brilliant of their comic personages give utterance to long epigrammatic lectures, in the tone (not I fear of all tones the most captivating) which best befits an academical prælection. The French *dramatis persona* is not an individual agent, behaving and talking as his own peculiar nature prompts him. He is but one of the various aspects of the dramatic author himself — one of the many vehicles for his emotions, for his wisdom, or for his wit. When we read Henry IV., we think only of Falstaff; when we read Andromache, we think only of Racine. Hence it is that neither in the familiar conversation of the French people, nor in their popular literature, do we often meet with the references (so incessant amongst ourselves) to the fictitious characters of the national stage, as though they were so many veritable men and women, the intimate acquaintance of us all. For not only the kings and sages, but the lacqueys and chambermaids, of the classical French theatre are all graduates of the Cartesian academy, — reasoners from whom, indeed, you learn no fallacies, but associates from whom you catch no inspiration. Our own national and invincible predilections will constrain us

all to look with infinitely greater pleasure upon the forest glade, over which the oak freely tosses his giant arms into the air, than upon all the gardens ever laid out by Le Notre, and on all the rectilineal avenues with which he has adorned them.

But Des Cartes had yet other pupils than these, whose genius shed a glory around the age, though not around the court of Louis XIV. In his correspondence is to be seen a letter from M. Marsenne, dated in November, 1639, referring to a youth of sixteen years of age, who had just finished a treatise on the conic sections, and who promised to rival the most illustrious mathematicians. The intelligence seems scarcely to have attracted the notice of the great philosopher, who however, after an interval of eight years, met this precocious genius, and conversed with him on the existence of a vacuum, on the weight of the atmosphere, and on the reality of that subtle matter which was then imagined to fill the illimitable regions of space. At the time of this interview Blaise Pascal, for that was the young man's name, was labouring under an access of the malady which accompanied him from the cradle to the grave, and Des Cartes (an amateur physician) was among the number of those who in vain suggested remedies for his relief. Feeble as was the bodily frame of Pascal, the few years which he passed in intercourse with the world were vehemently agitated by some of the most intense of the worldly passions. The years which intervened between his retirement to Port Royal des Champs and his death, were devoted to a preparation for that great change, — a preparation which consisted in the devout communing of his soul with God, and in preparing, for the benefit of mankind, that great work, of which the scattered fragments, under the name of Pascal's Thoughts, are in the hearts of many, and in the hands of all.

And yet not more than seven years had elapsed since the world was first placed in possession of a genuine col-



lection of them. The earliest edition had been rendered at once imperfect by the omissions, and redundant by the additions, to which the author's manuscripts had been subjected, by the jealous piety of his surviving associates at Port Royal. The existence of some such errors was generally known, but the extent of them was unsuspected, until M. Cousin surprised the world by the publication of many of the suppressed passages, in which Pascal appeared to avow a Pyrrhonism still more complete than that which he had himself condemned in Montaigne. To verify or to correct this discovery, M. Faugère entered upon a diligent examination of every document throwing any light on it, which could be found in the national or in the private archives of France. The result of this labour of love was the appearance of a new edition of the "Pensées," to which it seems scarcely possible that anything material should be added by any future inquirer. A careful collection and collocation of the scattered leaves of the original manuscripts has enabled M. Faugère to show, that the passages which had attracted M. Cousin's notice were, in reality, fragments of which the sense had been entirely changed by their accidental separation from their context or from each other. In what manner this has been proved, — what new views M. Faugère has been able to disclose of Pascal's character and doctrines, — and what that character and what those doctrines really were, — may be best learned from one of that series of Essays which, having been first given to the world anonymously, have recently been collected and published as his own, by Mr. Henry Rogers, one of the very few writers of our age and country who could, without presumption, have undertaken to fathom the learning, and to appreciate the genius, of Blaise Pascal. It is a presumption of which I shall not myself be guilty. It will be my humbler office to inquire, what is the place occupied by that great man in the literary history of his native land?

Pascal, then, was a Cartesian. Like Des Cartes, he began with doubt, in order that he might end in certainty. Like him, he renounced all allegiance to merely human authorities, however exalted, and however venerable. In the spirit of his master, he received what was passing in the microcosm of his own mind, as being, at least to himself, the primary and indispensable witness of truth. As a true disciple of that severe school, he not only revered his own reason as the supreme earthly judge of every question so brought under his cognisance, but conducted all such investigations by the aid of the same geometrical logic by which Des Cartes himself had been guided. And to complete the resemblance between these two great masters of the art and power of investigation, each of them abandoned his privilege of free inquiry, as soon as he entered within the sacred precincts of Faith, where he received, or professed to receive, the authentic intimations of the Divine will, in the spirit of a little child.

But here the similitude ended, and the divergence began. Des Cartes impersonated the "Pure reason," sojourning among men, to occupy herself, not with the business of their lives, but with the mysteries of their nature. Pascal impersonated human sympathy, yearning over the world from which he had withdrawn, and still responding to all the sorrows by which it was agitated. Lofty as was the range of his thoughts, they were never averted from that great human family to which he belonged. Every afflicted member of it had in him a fellow-sufferer. Driven into solitude by the anguish of disappointed hopes and blighted affections, he carried thither also the burden of a body oppressed by almost ceaseless pain or lassitude. And there, living continually, as Richard Baxter says of himself, on the confines of the church-yard, Pascal learnt, like that holy man, to regard physical science but as at best a manly sport, and metaphysical science as nothing more than a captivating amusement. But to learn that even

these studies were also vanity, was the most exquisitely painful of all the lessons he had as yet been taught. It delivered him over to the crushing burden of an existence, cheered by no pursuit, and animated by no interest. It was, however, a burden from which he was ere long delivered, and most solemn and pathetic are the words with which he celebrated his deliverance. They were inscribed on a sort of amulet, which, from that time forward to the last hour of his life, he never ceased to carry secretly on his person. "Père juste (he there exclaims), le monde te n'a point connu, mais je t'ai connu. Joie, joie, joie, pleurs de joie. Je m'en suis séparé! Renonciation totale et douce." He had thus found at last the relief of his own sorrows, but it was in renouncing his attachments to the world, that he might devote his mighty powers to the consolation of others.

Such was the spirit in which Pascal entered on the composition of his immortal "*Pensées*." Of those reflections, man was the subject; and, even in the absence of any positive testimony, the internal evidence might satisfy any reader of them, that the three men whom he had most profoundly studied were, Michel Montaigne, René Des Cartes, and Blaise Pascal. Who but the great essayist is the original of his vivid portrait of one made up of vanity and self-contradiction — so light and frivolous, as to be amused with the veriest trifles, even while he is the victim of misery, weakness, and insignificance — at once so little and so great — possessed with an insatiable desire for happiness beyond his reach, and thirsting for truth, to which he is unable to attain? Who but the great philosopher was the prototype of the exalted being he depicts, as evidently formed for infinity — as immense when contrasted with nothingness — as the great prodigy of nature — as gifted with powers to know and to desire what is good — as great, because he is able to know his own wretchedness — as nobler than the whole material universe, even if it were all united together to overwhelm him, because

*it* would be unconscious of its victory, and *he* conscious of his own destruction? And who but Pascal himself was that union of two — the composite man — the chimera — the chaos — the inconsistent and incomprehensible monster, whom his own energetic hand has so powerfully sketched?

It was from his introspection of that composite man that Pascal, like Des Cartes, derived some elementary truths to serve as the basis of a philosophy yet more divine than his. On the basis of his own consciousness he planted the lowest steps of the ladder on which, like that of the Hebrew patriarch, an ascent might, as he hoped, be at last made to the very gates of heaven. From those innate and unassailable ideas, he designed to evolve a series of consequences on which the mighty edifice of revealed truth might securely rest. He proposed to demonstrate the evangelical system by the Cartesian method. He undertook to establish the religion of prophecy and of miracle by the most severe logical induction. He summoned reason to lead the way to those elevated regions of thought, in which she must resign her charge to the guidance of faith and adoration. From a review of the relations and analogies between the nature of man and the revelation of God, was to be wrought out a chain of internal evidences, linking indissolubly together those primary verities which our consciousness attests, and those ultimate verities which Christianity discloses.

In these later times the Church has sustained no greater disappointment than in that premature death which intercepted the completion of Pascal's undertaking. The fragments of it lie scattered before us, and no meaner hand than his may presume to reconstruct and finish them. Yet, even in their unfinished state, they constitute the most effectual, perhaps, of all the succours by which uninspired man has relieved the human mind from the heavy burden of religious scepticism.

It is, however, but too evident that the great teacher

himself fainted occasionally beneath that burden throughout the whole of his mortal existence. M. Cousin's discoveries have, it is true, been superseded by the still more recent discoveries of M. Faugère. But enough remains to show that Pascal paid the usual penalties of genius, and that not even he could ascend heights of such surpassing elevation, without perceiving that mists and obscurity hung over some parts of the boundless prospects which his mental vision commanded. And hence not, perhaps, the least attractive charm of his profound meditations. What more pathetic than the sadness with which he gazes on the impassable limits of his inquiries, and on the seeming contradictions to which they have conducted him? What more sublime than the resolute integrity with which he scrutinises and rejects the proffered aid of sophisms to enlarge and reconcile his views? What more touching than the meekness with which his fatigued and anxious spirit finds, in the assurances of faith, the repose which he has sought in vain from the most intense and persevering efforts of reason? .

Much, however, of the painful unrest which preyed upon the mind of the author of the "Pensées" may, I believe, be ascribed to the necessity under which he lay, of embracing the whole of the tenets of that branch of the Universal Church to which he belonged. The superincumbent mass of her doctrines was continually tending to displace the foundations of his belief, deep and solid as they were. Even the intellect of Pascal was oppressed in the attempt to connect his innate ideas—those elementary evidences of truth which he drew from his own self-consciousness—with such dogmas as those of human merit—of the worship of saints—of ecclesiastical infallibility—and of the transubstantiation of the elements. Yet, until that connection had been thus firmly established, his heart might not find, in the communion of papal Rome, the tranquillity and the solace of which it stood in need;

and he never sought it in any other Christian fellowship than theirs.

Sometimes, indeed, he found relief from sceptical thoughts by diverting his mind to topics of a less overwhelming interest. Some years before his retirement, the Jesuits had accused him of a disingenuous plagiarism from the Italians, on the subject of the weight of the atmosphere; and it is said that his father repelled the imputation by the prophetic menace, that a day would come when the youth whom they had injured would inflict on themselves an eternal shame and penitence. The utterance of this prediction is, however, doubtful; but we know from the authority of his sister, Madame Perrier, that he undertook the *Provincial Letters* at the request of Arnauld, who had not himself succeeded in successfully refuting the condemnation which, at the instance of the Jesuits, had been launched against him by the Sorbonne. And keen, indeed, were the shafts of the champion of Port Royal, and irremediable their wounds. Although, at the present day, few perhaps, if any, feel an interest in the controversy on its own account; yet I cannot but avow my own opinion that, in that controversy, much less than justice is rendered by Pascal to his antagonists. Father Daniel, one of the most learned of them, has written an answer which no one, I think, can read without conceiving some distrust of the accuracy of the great censor, both as a logician and as a narrator of matters of fact. But both Daniel and Pascal leave unnoticed what I apprehend to be the true answer to a large part of the argument, or rather of the invective, of the *Provincial Letters*. It is, that whoever will undertake to prescribe a system of morals in which every principle of virtue shall be brought to the test of extreme cases, and shall be accommodated to them, will, ere long, find himself in a region of hypothesis, in which darkness must be often put for light, and light for darkness. But thus to control and guide the

conscience by peremptory rules, embracing every conceivable problem of human conduct, was not peculiar to the Jesuits. Such casuistry was part of the religious system of the Jansenists also; and, indeed, of every other section of the Church of Rome. It formed the code to be administered in the judgment seat of the confessional. Pascal and Daniel might each have silenced the other by the remark; or by the acknowledgment, that their common spiritual mother was really responsible for the extravagances of Escobar and Sanchez, because she required all her children to live under the law of virtue considered as an abstract science, rather than under the law of virtue considered as a sentiment spontaneously arising in the regenerate heart.

But the reader of the Provincial Letters can hardly pause to form any such cold censure. It seems to him impossible, that a weapon of such exquisite edge and temper should be wielded by any other arm than that of truth herself. He cannot believe that a fiction so simple, and yet so admirably adapted to its purpose, as the imaginary dialogue of the first ten letters, should be really affording concealment to any error. He rejects as incredible the supposition, that any darkness (conscious or unconscious) should really be overclouding a mind which can infuse a light so pellucid into that metaphysical chaos, and can animate with so much life and warmth the dry bones of so obscure a controversy. And while Pascal exercises this kind of spell over the understanding of his readers, he holds their imagination also in equal bondage. His first ten letters are a kind of comedy, glowing with all the illusions, the irony, the gaiety, and the wit of the French theatre in the age of Louis XIV. Then, however, the scene is shifted. The well-meaning but bewildered interpréter of the Jesuitical casuists and his Socratic interrogator are dismissed from the stage, and the Port Royalist appears in his own person to pronounce

an indignant invective on the extravagant and atrocious opinions into which his too candid interlocutor has been beguiled. It is an invective as withering as ever proceeded from the French pulpit, when ringing with the vehement eloquence of Bossuet, or the inexorable argumentation of Bourdaloue.

I have said that I aim at nothing more than to ascertain the place properly belonging to Pascal in the literary history of his native land. It is a position unlike that of any of his illustrious competitors. With each of them literature was the great business and object of life. With Pascal it may be said to have been rather at one time a recreation, at another a self-sacrifice — a recreation or a self-sacrifice of an intellectual giant. He played with physical and mathematical science, and abandoned it as a pastime unworthy the heir of an immortal existence. He played with theological controversy, and turned aside from it also as a pursuit below the dignity of his sacred vocation. He did not *play*, indeed, with the task of demonstrating the truths of Christianity, but he undertook it in a spirit of compassionate sympathy for his brethren of mankind, with which no desire for their applause, nor any other secular motive, was allowed to mingle. Into these relaxations, and into these tasks, the whole soul of the author was unreservedly thrown; and in each of them in turn he exhibits some new aspect of his sublime and comprehensive spirit. Except from these genuine and undesigned self-disclosures, it would have been scarcely credible, that, in the same mind, could have met, in perfect harmony, the reasoning powers of a great mathematician and the imagination of a great poet — the genial warm-heartedness of a philanthropist and the playful satire of a comedian — the condensed energy of an orator and the profound and conscientious deliberations of a philosopher; or that the canvass on which he wrought out these prodigies of genius



should be ever glowing with the well-ordered contrasts, the graceful variety, and the rich colouring of a painter of human life and manners.

Pascal, however, in common with all his illustrious contemporaries, was deficient in one of the moral sciences. I refer to that science which investigates the principles of all social institutions, the causes and tendencies of historical events, and the rights and duties of man as a member of the commonwealth. While every other field of knowledge was cultivated in France, Political Philosophy alone was neglected. In other lands, by the aid of such studies, the mental had triumphed over the physical power; but there, mind, though victorious in every other enterprise, was powerless to secure to society the blessings of a wise, just, and impartial government. What were the real causes of this ill success? or, in other words, to revert to the problem with a view to which I have engaged in this slight and hasty retrospect of French literature, What was its effect on the constitution of the civil government of France? The answer to that question must at least touch on the political influence of each of the three Schools to which I have been referring — of the School of the Pyrrhonists, or the successors of Abélard — of the School of the Ideologists, or the successors of Bernard — and of the School of the Ergoists, or the successors of Calvin. The means by which the kings of France first compelled the great authors of their country to abandon their high office of explaining and improving the polity of the state, and then reduced them to the degraded rank of sycophants or idolaters of the royal power, are the fit subjects of a distinct consideration.

First, then, the Pyrrhonic School, or Succession, of the men of letters of France, may be deduced from Abélard as its patriarch, though Rabelais, Montaigne, Des Cartes, and Pascal, and many intervening but more obscure writers, till it reaches Bayle, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and the other contributors to the *Encyclopédie* of the 18th century. It

was the common design of them all, though that design was not avowed by them all with equal frankness, to embark on the voyage for the discovery of truth from "provisional doubt," as their common point of departure; that is, from a total absence of all positive opinions whatever. I stated on a former occasion, why I believe every such attempt to proceed on a misconception of the fundamental laws of our moral nature, and of the immutable conditions of human life. I am well convinced, despite the examples of Abélard, of Des Cartes, and of Pascal, that he who, rebelling against those laws, and impatient of that condition, shall really commence his search for truth in a state of provisional doubt about all things, will end in a state of incurable doubt about everything. Whoever forces his mind into the habit of collecting from every quarter, and of presenting vividly to his imagination, all the difficulties to which every doctrine, religious, moral, or political, is more or less obnoxious; and who, then, makes such difficulties the subjects of his protracted study, is inevitably, though unconsciously, disqualifying himself for the clear discernment, or for the cordial acceptance, of any doctrines whatever. Progressively abandoning his faith in everything else, he at length abandons all faith in himself, and acquiesces in the melancholy hypothesis, that the primæval cause of his existence (whatever that unknown cause may be) called him into being (if indeed his existence be real), with this eager craving for knowledge, that it might conduct him, not to light, but to darkness; not to the discovery of the order and symmetry of all things, but to a view of all things, warring with each other in wild and chaotic confusion. Commencing with universal doubt, he will end with universal scepticism.

By scepticism, as I at present employ that word, I do not mean the suspension of the judgment on each successive subject of inquiry, nor that freedom of mind which, in the result of any such inquiry, can lay aside the most cherished preconceptions, and embrace truth,

even if she at length presents herself in a form the most unexpected and unwelcome. Without such scepticism as this, the search for truth is but a mockery; and the inquirer, however much he may vaunt his freedom, is, in fact, a bondsman. The scepticism which I impute to so many of the great French writers, is a very different state of mind from this. They were opinionless, and were content to be so. They were destitute of settled convictions, and cheerfully acquiesced in the want of them. Even so far as they could attain to any definite creed, they held by it faintly and irresolutely. They had no faith which they were ready to attest by any considerable sacrifice; none to which they clung as an indestructible part of their portion in this life, or of their inheritance beyond the grave.

If, as I am constrained to infer, Abélard, and Rabelais, and Montaigne, and Bayle, and so many others of their illustrious lineage in France, were in this sense of the word sceptics, it seems to me to follow inevitably, that a large part of their readers were sceptics also. For they became illustrious, precisely because they were the faithful interpreters of the thoughts and feelings which had already been born, or were struggling into life, in the minds of their contemporaries. Their popular acceptance and their fame were earned by that fidelity. They would have inculcated Pyrrhonism in vain, and would have been unrewarded by the laurel in any land, of which the prevailing tendencies were not already Pyrrhonic. They gave to those tendencies a strength and a decision, which would have been unattainable without their aid; but though they fostered, they did not create, them.

That scepticism has long been among the natural characteristics of Frenchmen, I infer, not merely from the general tone of so much of their literature, but also from that peculiarity of it which French critics make their boast. It bears, as they very truly say, constant witness to the national passion for abstract ideas. That passion,

indeed, animates not their books only, but their discourses in the senate, in the pulpit, and at the bar. It takes possession of their clubs, and even of their private society. No aspirant after wit or wisdom in France can make good his pretensions, unless he knows how to scale the transcendental peaks of philosophy. To this species of the sublime, they are ever ready to sacrifice even the beautiful. The fine mental sense of Greece (where the love of beauty was a national and universal instinct) would have rejected, with unutterable scorn, those supersensuous embellishments with which Frenchmen, especially in our own times, rejoice to adorn their poetry, their history, and their rhetoric. For, in truth, such ornaments are as cheap and vulgar as they are unbecoming. Any man of common intelligence may be easily trained to any legerdmain of the understanding—to the making of abstractions, for example, as easily as to the making of jokes, or the making of verses. The production of apophthegms is a hard task to him, and to him only, who allows himself to utter no words, without both a definite meaning and a profound conviction of the truth of what he says. The throes and labours of a long life preceded the birth of each of the sayings for which as many of the sages of Greece have been immortalised. But the writer of the newspaper which lies on your breakfast table at Paris, is never without his pearls of superlative wisdom to scatter over his account of yesterday's review or opera.

Whence then is this national habit of quitting the solid earth for the hazy clouds? It is nothing else than the love of that "provisional doubt" in which these aeronauts find their pleasure and their glory. By the aid of these metaphysical juggleries of words, they sublimate, darken, and dissolve all doctrines, even without the express and formal contradiction of any. They live in a region of half meanings, or of no meaning,—in a state of contented,

though perhaps unconscious, scepticism. Wedded to no political opinions, but dallying with all, they pass, in a few brief years, through all the phases in which political society has ever exhibited itself amongst men, though never lacking "pure ideas" with which to polish periods, and to darken counsel, about each.

The France of the last sixty years has, indeed, been in a state of chronic and unnatural distortion. But her intellectual habits were not, and could not have been, essentially different at those periods when the hill and gardens of Ste. Geneviève were thronged with the disciples of Abélard, or when the booksellers' shops were besieged by purchasers of the *Gargantua*, or when the ladies of Versailles were writing Cartesian letters. The enthusiastic popularity of their sceptical teachers has, from age to age, been at once the effect and the cause of that state of the national mind, of which we may read the results in every page of their national history. That history everywhere depicts a people gallant, gay, ingenious, versatile, and ardent, beyond all rivalry and all example. But it also sets before us a race more destitute than any other of profound and immutable convictions, and, therefore, less capable than any other of a steady progress in the great practical science of constitutional government,—a people who are, at one time, the sport of any demagogue who can veil his selfish ambition under the cant of "pure ideas;" and, at another time, the victims of any despot who may be strong enough to trample both the ideologists and their verbal science under his feet. To have induced, or cherished, this mental temperament is, I believe, the well-founded reproach of the "Pyrrhonic succession" in France.

The lessons of those who succeeded to the mystic Bernard, and who represented him in later times than his own, however opposite to these in their character, were not very dissimilar in their results. I pause at the entrance into a

chapter of ecclesiastical history, upon which I am, for many reasons, at once reluctant and incompetent to enter. It belongs not to me, but to others amongst us, to explain what were the religious and philosophical tenets of the Gallican Church, as represented by the Sorbonne, and by the chiefs of the various religious orders. I believe, however, that many of the most powerful members of those bodies, from the days of Bernard to those of Quesnel, adopted each of the two cardinal articles of the peculiar creed of the Abbot of Clairvaux,—the first being his dogma of the spiritual discernment, by the regenerate soul, of the mystic characters engraven on it by the very hand of the Creator, in attestation of the whole system of Roman Catholic doctrine,—the second being his dogma that, to the pure in heart, all Divine truth is attainable by means of that beatific vision, to which, even in this life, they are admitted. In other words, the great French Divines throughout that period were for the most part proficient in Bernard's "Philosophy of Love." To draw up an exact series of such of them as by their writings inculcated on the people of France opinions substantially identical with these, would demand a kind, and a degree, of knowledge to which I have no pretension. But that such opinions have long prevailed among them, and are, at this moment, maintained in that country by the Hagiologists, who are labouring there so zealously for the advancement of the interests of the See of Rome, is a fact familiar to all who are conversant with their books; and from those books may also be gathered many curious intimations of the descent of those mysterious dogmas from one generation to another. It may, however, be a sufficient proof of their vitality to observe, that it was in order to repress such speculations, that the Court of Rome pronounced her censure upon Fénelon, and agitated the whole of France by the Bull *Unigenitus*.

All the argumentative shafts of the Pyrrhonists might have been discharged in vain against such a spiritual coat of mail as this. All the syllogisms which Aristotle ever investigated and constructed would have been unable to disturb any one of the dreams of Madame Guyon. The Stagyrte himself would have been utterly baffled by an antagonist who had so completely shaken off all the fetters of logic. But Rabelais was the most effectual of all auxiliaries to those who had vainly assailed these great outworks of Papal Rome with their impotent dialectics. His hearty laugh triumphed over antagonists who were altogether beyond the reach of argument. Yet no alliance could be more disastrous even to those Polemics who invoked it. He was the intellectual progenitor of Voltaire. He was the first of that long line of mockers and gibbers who hold a position so prominent and so unfortunate in the literary history of France. In no other land has such perfection been ever attained, in the art of drawing merriment from the most serious subjects which can engage the thoughts of man; nor is there any mental habit so unfriendly to the growth of firm convictions, and to stability of purpose amongst those who addict themselves to it. In his own appropriate province Momus is well enough; but when he wanders from it into the regions sacred to our highest interests, temporal and eternal, he brings with him a moral pestilence.

As Mysticism and Quietism were impenetrable weapons of defence against all argument, so they were very formidable weapons of assault against all imputed heresies. I pointed out, in a former lecture, the intimacy of the relation which they bore to the persecutions of the court of Rome. They assured the persecutor of his own absolute infallibility. They taught him that dissent from his opinions was nothing less than fatal. They appeared to him to convict the heretic, not of a mere error of judgment, but of an obdurate depravity of will. They supplied all the premises of which the stake was the actual

if not, indeed, the legitimate, consequence. Many have been the enemies of the peace of mankind, but none so ruthless as the Ideologists. Many are the thoughts which have steeled the heart of man to mercy, but none so effectually as a "pure idea" in full possession of it. The rapacity of De Montfort might have been satiated with the plunder and conquest of the Albigenses — but the gloomy purpose of the souls of Innocent III. and his successors demanded their extermination. Catherine de Medici and the House of Guise might have been satisfied to reign over heretical subjects, if they could have been terrified into silence and submission — but Philip II. and Gregory XIII. were haunted by a dark spirit, which required that the whole realm of France should be saturated with the blood of the Huguenots. Richelieu aimed at nothing more than to crush the political confederacy of La Rochelle — but the Confessors of Louis XIV. could be appeased by nothing less than the Dragonnades.

The Mystic and Quietist literature of France was pre-eminently devout, both in its tone and in its design. But it propagated those views to which may be ascribed the massacre of the Albigenses and of the Huguenots. It contributed more powerfully than any other teaching to annihilate, in the minds of men, that modest self-distrust, by which the uplifted arm may be arrested before it falls in vengeance on those who dissent from our opinions. It fostered what I have before called the pride of belief — the pride of him who, believing that his own soul is a mirror reflecting the eternal verities of the Divine intellect, considers it impious to doubt his own infallibility. The stories of the Albigensian crusade and of the wars of religion are, indeed, so revolting, that the reader of them is reconciled to his own nature only by remembrance that crimes so unparalleled had their basis rather in the illusions of the human heart than in its malignity. Those crimes, however, have not been without their penalties.



The royal exterminators of the heretics were elevated by their destruction to an absolute and despotic power over every class and variety of their subjects. Those literary teachers, whose mysticism scattered the too prolific seeds of those persecutions, were therefore, in effect, the most fatal of all enemies to the growth of constitutional liberty in France.

Nor is it possible to exempt the great author of the *Institution Chrétienne*, and the "Ergoists," who acknowledged in him their intellectual progenitor, from their share of the responsibility for the failure of sound principles of government amongst the French people. His book furnished the premises of which his Presbyterian scheme of Church government in France was the practical consequence. As we formerly saw, it was a polity founded on principles as purely democratic, as were proclaimed in the *States General*, either by Marcel or by Mirabeau. Calvin was one of the "grands organisateurs" of France; and, in common with almost the whole of that class of French politicians, he placed himself much more under the guidance of logic than of those other habits, or powers of the human mind, to which less ambitious statesmen render not indeed an exclusive, but a willing, homage. He reasoned with inexorable precision, and as he reasoned, so he acted. To compare things utterly dissimilar in every other respect, his *Institution Chrétienne*, and the *Ecclesiastical Economy* to which it gave birth, tallied with the revolutionary declaration of the "rights of man," and the constitutional act which followed it. In either case the logic was invulnerable, and in each the scheme was impracticable. In either case the design was to advance the cause of freedom, and in each the result was to render that cause utterly hopeless.

In his study at Geneva, Calvin seems to have forgotten the real condition of the people, and of the government, of his native land. Perhaps he believed that his disciples

would be strong enough to obtain the mastery of that government ; but if so, it was an entire and a fatal mistake. He established an ecclesiastical democracy in a nation in which political freedom had not so much as a nominal existence, and in which the vast majority were the willing subjects of a spiritual despotism. No man could reason more closely, and no man divined the future more unskillfully. No vision of such a monarch as Richelieu presented itself to his foresight. He did not foresee that, by asserting the independence of the Presbyterian Church, he was securing for it a mortal enemy in the first great statesman who might be strong enough to assert the supremacy of the Crown over all the other institutions of France. He fell into the error, so habitual to almost all French Reformers, of sacrificing the practical to the theoretical, and of squandering all which might have been secured, in the vain hope of at once grasping everything which could be desired. I therefore place him and his followers, amongst those whose writings contributed to the growth of absolute power in France — because he, and they in obedience to his lessons, presented to the French Monarchs, and especially to Richelieu, the greatest of them all, an antagonistic power which at once provoked and justified their hostility — because he and they enlisted the honest national sentiments of their fellow-countrymen, against a system pregnant with the seeds of national disunion — because he and they inculcated religious freedom in a strain so lofty and uncompromising, as to render it barren of political freedom, its natural and legitimate offspring.

It remains for me to indicate (most briefly of course) the means by which the kings of France compelled the great writers of their country to abandon their high and appropriate office, of explaining and improving the polity of the state.

During one hundred and forty years the unjust ambition of England had inflicted on that country all the calamities of foreign and of civil war. But scarcely had the French people been rescued from the scourge of foreign invasion, before they in turn inflicted it on their unoffending Italian neighbours. In their lawless thirst for extended dominion, Charles VIII., and his two immediate successors, delivered up the whole of that peninsula to misery and bloodshed.

At the revival of learning, an Italian patriot might well have indulged the hope of the growth, in his native land, of the science of government, with all the practical blessings which are the natural fruit of the general diffusion of such knowledge. He might have dwelt on the admirable genius of the people, on their unrivalled academical institutions, on their exclusive possession of many of the treasures of ancient learning, and on the division of the country into several commonwealths at once independent and emulous of each other. He might, indeed, have anticipated a formidable hostility to such pursuits from the various feudal sovereigns of the secular states of Italy, and a yet more dangerous obstacle in the sacerdotal despotism of Rome. But he could hardly have foreseen that a series of new invasions of the Gauls would again crush the rising prospects of Italian independence. They appeared, however, to the South of the Alps, sometimes as the allies, and sometimes as the avowed enemies of the Pope, the Italian Princes, the Spaniards, and the Germans; but always agreeing with them in interdicting those studies which might have taught the prostrate Italian people how their oppressors might be successfully opposed. Crushed beneath the combination of those irresistible forces, the more profound thinkers of Italy extracted out of their own national degradation a new and ill-omened political science. Machiavelli taught how evil might be called good, and good evil; while Guicciardini, Davila, and Paolo Sarpi assumed in their histories that the rulers of mankind were

really guided by these Florentine maxims. We are all familiar with Mr. Macaulay's profound and beautiful analysis of the political morality of that age and country, and with his explanation of the methods by which the homage justly due to integrity and truth, was there transferred to successful fraud, and well-timed treachery. From this demon worship, however, the nobler spirits of Italy turned aside, some, like Galileo and Cassini, to cultivate physical science; some, like Baronius and Muratori, to immerse themselves in antiquarian researches; while many more, following the indestructible bent and genius of their nation, soared away to the regions of creative art, where the follies and the crimes, and, perhaps also the duties, of the lower world were forgotten. In that fairy land they combined the wild imagination of the North with the riant fancies of the East; and there Tasso and Ariosto took refuge from the world of realities in a world of chimeras, where the Paladins of Charlemagne and the story-tellers of Haroun al Raschid meet together, and Christian affections are forced into a strange alliance with the doctrines of Mahomed, and with the magical arts of the fire-worshippers over whom he had triumphed.

But when the French had been driven to the northward of the Alps, the punishment which they had provoked overtook them. The calamities with which they were visited bore an ominous and awful resemblance to those which they had themselves inflicted on the Italian commonwealths. As France had carried the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, from the one end of the peninsula to the other, so, from the Somme to the Pyrenees, no French province escaped the desolating march of the religious wars. As France had torn from Italy some of her finest territories, so was she compelled to cede to her own foreign enemies her ancient suzerainté over those wealthy regions which now constitute the Belgic kingdom. As she had been allied with the Germans and the Spaniards

in the devastation of the Transalpine States, so she had to bewail the ravages of her own, by German and Spanish invaders. As her kings had sought the aid of the Medici, in subverting the rights of the neighbouring principalities and republics, so an alliance with a daughter of that house eventually subjugated France, during three successive reigns, to a woman born to be her evil genius and her shame. And as the French invaders of Italy, combining with the Pope, the Imperial and the Spanish crowns, had diverted her men of genius from studies conducing to an enlightened polity and to good government, so Catherine and her sons, in alliance with the Papal Court, the League, and Philip II., banished from France the culture and propagation of a knowledge so unwelcome to her infatuated rulers.

Before the Italian wars, such knowledge had not been altogether neglected there. Joinville, as we have seen, had frankly and impartially exhibited the interior, and Froissart the exterior, aspect of the courts by which, in their times, the world was governed; and De Comines had even been, not only the free interpreter, but the enlightened judge, of the policy of the sovereigns whom he served. But no similar revelations or judgments are to be found in the great French authors who succeeded them. The contending hosts in the wars of religion were all, indeed, assisted by squadrons of light-armed literary partisans, by whom libels, pamphlets, and pasquinades were discharged in as thick a flight, as the homicidal missiles of the men-at-arms. But I know of no book written by any Frenchman in that age, for the instruction of future ages (except the works of Calvin and of his coadjutors, Farel and Theodore Beza), in which the intellectual rulers of the world, asserting their imprescriptible authority over the secular rulers of it, have summoned them to the bar of their literary tribunal. Calvin, Farel, and Beza, indeed, exercised that dangerous privilege; but it was as exiles

from their native land. Rabelais concealed the infrequent and furtive use of it, under the mask and riot of a buffoon. The occasional encroachments of Montaigne beyond the limits permitted to men of letters, were sheltered from punishment, and perhaps from notice, by his careless and unimpassioned optimism, by his seeming indifference about any opinions, and by his sportive dalliance with all. Des Cartes escaped the censorship of the government by occupying himself in researches in which the most jealous autocrat could hardly see any hazard to his own authority; and Pascal enjoyed a precarious safety, by confining himself to the laws of the material universe, and to theological investigations or controversy. Yet even Pascal would have partaken of the penalties of his great coadjutor Arnauld, if the grave had not closed over him before the publication of his *Pensées*; and if the appearance of the Provincial Letters had not been hailed by the acclamations of a body, of which even Louis XIV. stood in habitual awe — the wits and epigrammatists of Paris.

But it was not enough for the kings of France to silence all political speculations, unless they also reduced the great authors of their country to the degraded rank of sycophants, or idolaters of the royal power.

Richelieu (himself no inconsiderable author) brought the men of letters of France into bondage to the Court, by creating a sort of literary aristocracy, composed of the members of the French Academy, the honours of which were to be won by the favour of the royal patron. Louis XIV. subjected them to a still more complete dependence. It was a conquest for which nature and fortune had combined to qualify him. He was born if not with great yet with impressive and plausible abilities, with a princely spirit, a majestic presence, a mellifluous voice, a figure resplendent with grace and beauty, an exquisite sense of all the proprieties of life, with captivating manners, and an elocution adapting itself to all the emergencies of his high

station, and alike felicitous in them all. He reigned in an age when centuries of civil war and of aristocratic ambition had driven the whole people of France to the throne, as their only refuge against their protracted and intolerable sufferings; and before a throne occupied by so magnificent an impersonation of royalty they presented themselves not merely as supplicants, but almost as worshippers. Nor was this the impulse of those only who were in mean station or in intellect. In the reign of Louis, king worship was part of the religion of the men of rank, and of genius also. The imaginations of many of them were inflamed by his personal grandeur, and by his splendid achievements. The hearts of some were touched by his affability and his kindness. Without presuming to criticise his measures, they admired in him the living reality of their ideal of a monarch, and delineated him in all their writings as the great central object, around and in subjection to which were grouped all the other figures with which their invention or their memory could supply them. Fénelon alone, in his character of Mentor to the Duke of Burgundy, ventured to address some counsels on the duty and science of government, nominally to the Telemachus, but really to the Idomeneus, of the court of Versailles; and Fénelon's exile to Cambray may be ascribed as much to his freedom of speech, as to his quietism of soul. The impatience with which, on the one hand, the Great King regarded the interference of his literary courtiers with his affairs of state, and, on the other hand, their submissive acquiescence in his rebukes, can hardly, indeed, be exaggerated. Witness the fact so strange, and yet so certain, that Racine actually sickened and died, on being censured by his royal idol, for his arrogance in hazarding a suggestion for the prevention and cure of pauperism.

But the constellation of genius, wit, and learning, in the midst of which Louis shone thus pre-eminently, was

too brilliant to be obscured by any clouds of royal disfavour; nor would any man have shrunk with greater abhorrence than himself, from any attempt to extinguish or to eclipse their splendour. He wisely felt, and frankly acknowledged, that their glory was essential to his own; and he invited, to a seat at his table, Molière the roturier, to whom the lowest of his nobles would have appointed a place among his menial servants. As Francis, and Charles, and Leo, and Julius, and Lorenzo had assigned science, and poetry, and painting, and architecture, and sculpture, for their appropriate provinces, to those great master spirits of Italy, to whom they forbade the culture of political philosophy, so Louis, when he interdicted to the gigantic intellects of his times and country all intervention in the affairs of the commonwealth, summoned them to the conquest of all the other realms of thought in which they might acquire renown, either for him, for France, or for themselves. The theatres, the academies, the pulpits, and the monasteries of his kingdom rivalled each other in their zealous obedience to that royal command, and they obeyed it with a success from which no competent and equitable judge can withhold his highest admiration. At this day, when all the illusions of the name of Louis are exhausted, and in this country, where his Augustan age has seldom been regarded with much enthusiasm, who can seriously address himself to the perusal of his great tragedians, Corneille and Racine — or of his great comedians, Molière and Régnard — or of his great poets, Boileau and La Fontaine — or of his great wits, La Rochefaucauld and La Bruyère — or of his great philosophers, Des Cartes and Pascal — or of his great divines, Bossuet and Arnauld — or of his great scholars, Mabillon and Montfauçon — or of his great preachers, Bourdaloue, and Massillon — and not confess that no other monarch was ever surrounded by an assemblage of men of genius



so admirable for the extent, the variety, and the perfection of their powers.

Now the fact that such an assemblage were clustered into a group, of which so great a king was the centre, implies that there must have been some characteristic quality uniting them all to each other and to him, and distinguishing them all from the nobles of every other literary commonwealth which has existed amongst men. What, then, was that quality, and what its influence upon them?

Louis lived with his courtiers, not as a despot among his slaves, but as the most accomplished of gentlemen among his associates. This social equality was, however, always guarded from abuse by the most punctilious observance, on their side, of the reverence due to his pre-eminent rank. In that enchanted circle men appeared at least to obey, not from a hard necessity, but from a willing heart. The bondage in which they really lived was ennobled by that conventional code of honour which dictated and enforced it. They prostrated themselves before their fellow-man with no sense of self-abasement, and the chivalrous homage with which they gratified him, was considered as imparting dignity to themselves.

Louis acknowledged and repaid this tribute of courtesy, by a condescension still more refined, and by attentions yet more delicate than their own. The harshness of power was so ingeniously veiled, every shade of approbation was so nicely marked, and every gradation of favour so finely discriminated, that the tact of good society — that acquired sense, which reveals to us the impression we make on those with whom we associate — became the indispensable condition of existence at Versailles and Marly. The inmates of those palaces lived under a law peculiar to themselves; a law most effective for its purposes, though the recompense it awarded to those who pleased their common master was but his smile, and though the penalty

it imposed on those who displeased him was but his frown.

The men of letters, to whom a place was assigned in the court of Louis, were nearly all plebeians, but were rescued by the king from the social degradations to which their rank might otherwise have exposed them. The graces and the elegance which they witnessed in his circle, were not only adopted in their own personal address and manners, but were infused into their writings. To please, and to rise by pleasing, became the great ends of literary, as they were of fashionable, existence. Men of genius sought to please in the republic of letters, as they had learned to please among the aristocratic companions of their princes. They ascended to literary power by the arts, which, in that age, conducted the nobles of the land to power in the state. They aimed at creating a profound interest by their books, without ever provoking a painful excitement. Those books were redolent of the same graceful ease, by which they had themselves been charmed in the intercourse of the privileged classes. They exhibited, as authors, the same gaiety of spirit which they had seen diffusing, through that elevated circle, the transient sense of equality, so indispensable to all true social enjoyment. Having learnt, in the brilliant companies which thronged the royal salons, how mighty is the force of ridicule, they assumed, in their literary character, all the weapons, offensive and defensive, by which the assaults of that great aristocratic power may be either pointed or repelled. Diligent students of the conventional code of manners, they became familiar with all the signals beneath which it commands the polished few to rally, and with all the penalties which it denounces against the unpolished many, who are heedless or unconscious of that rallying cry. Minds born to grapple with the loftiest contemplations were thus too often engaged with the most trivial. They were but too apt to study the superficial

aspect of society, to the disregard of its inward state and of its outward tendencies. They investigated the specific man more than the generic man, the French character more than the human character, the empty vanities of the world rather than its true dignities, the fleeting follies of mankind more than their inherent weaknesses or corruptions. Molière himself, great as he was, condescended to become little else than the Lord Justiciary, under Louis XIV., of the High Court of Ridicule.

But while many of the nobler pursuits of literature were thus abandoned, the learned courtiers of Louis found, in their mental and social allegiance to him, the fullest occasion for exercising and perfecting those qualities which, at the commencement of my last lecture, I enumerated as eminently characteristic of the spirit and intellect of the people of France. Their social disposition and genial nature rendered it easy and delightful to them to reflect, in their books, the gaiety, the grace, and the cordiality of the high-born associates with whom they mingled. Their logical acumen detected at a glance, and expelled remorselessly from their writings, whatever would have appeared to that fastidious audience either vulgar, or exaggerated, or tedious, or obscure. They used the most abstruse deductions of reason, as Cleopatra used her pearls, to add an occasional zest to a royal banquet. Their national eloquence shone forth with unwearied lustre, though, even in the pulpit, they never wholly intermitted the homage so habitually rendered to their princely idol. But, above all, the unmeasured obedience of the French people to whatever was esteemed as a legitimate power among them, was manifested by the authors of their Augustan age by the most indiscriminating loyalty. Because Louis was superstitious and intolerant, not a voice was raised among them in defence of spiritual or of mental freedom. Because he was an absolute king, they breathed not a word on behalf of their national franchises. Because he was himself the

state, they passed by the affairs of the commonwealth as though the discussion of them would have been a case of *lèse majesté* against him. Because success in war was his favourite boast, they incessantly laboured in erecting trophies to his military renown. Because he was amorous, they sang of love in strains sometimes impassioned, sometimes artificial, but always in harmony with the sentiments which rumour taught them to ascribe to their king. And because he was the admitted model of universal excellence, the greatest minds which France has ever produced, drew habitually and servilely from that model in many of their greatest works.

Genius such as theirs could not, however, but triumph over such obstacles as these. Even under the spells and the bondage of the court of Louis, she made manifest her inherent and indomitable energies. Yet the marks of those shackles are indelibly impressed upon her works. It is for this reason chiefly, that, beyond the limits of France itself, their power is so feebly felt and so coldly acknowledged. Considered as a mere matter of taste, this is, indeed, of little or of no importance. But it is of the deepest moment to mankind that, in the age and country of Louis XIV., Literature was faithless to her highest calling,—that her great authors never aspired to the free investigation of truth religious, or of truth political,—that the men of the 17th century abdicated that high office to the men of the succeeding age,—and that Racine, Boileau, Molière, Bossuet, and Arnauld abandoned the highest of all the realms of merely human inquiry to the fatal ambition of Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Beaumarchais. Seizing on that deserted province, those great writers assailed the ancient bulwarks of our faith in that Divine power in whom we have our being, and in those human powers to which God himself has commanded us to be subject. They found those fortresses in France unprotected by any recent defences, and dilapi-

dated by long neglect ; and a century has now nearly run its course since the literature of the age of Louis XV. won a disastrous triumph, which might have been averted if the literature of the age of his predecessor had exchanged the debasing service of an idolised man for that service which we are taught to regard, and which we rejoice to accept, as our perfect freedom.

## LECTURE XXI.

ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE  
ABSOLUTE MONARCHY.

I HAVE thus far been engaged in an attempt to explain why neither those causes which subverted the French Feudal Oligarchy, nor those which seemed to promise the establishment of Constitutional Government in France, were effectual to arrest the growth of the Absolute Monarchy there. I propose, in the present Lecture, to inquire according to what constitutional rules or methods that Absolute Monarchy was legally administered. I design on some future occasions to pass briefly in review the spirit in which it was actually administered by some of the more eminent of the successive administrators of it.

It is obvious, but it is not superfluous, to remark, that no system of government to which a highly civilised people were subject during six successive generations, could possibly retain, throughout that long period, an absolute identity, or any very near approach to it. The statements which I am about to make must therefore be received with all the qualifications attaching to a portraiture of any object which is continually shifting its position and its aspect; and although the retrospect which

I am about to take will commence at the infancy, and terminate at the fall, of the Capetien monarchy, yet, when no other date is expressly indicated, I would be understood as referring to the last thirty years of the reign of Louis XV., that being the period in which the monarchical institutions of the kingdom were flourishing in their greatest vigour, and most unrestricted authority. It was a period also in which France herself was progressively assuming a new character.

The Frenchmen of that day were perceptibly acquiring that national unity which in our own day constitutes their just boast, and imparts to them advantages unrivalled amongst any other of the principal States of Europe. They were however still widely distinguished from each other by race, by language, and by laws. The pure blood and uncorrupted dialect of the Franco-Gallic people was as yet confined to those central regions, which, under the early Capetien kings, had composed the Royal Domain. The Teutonic origin of the inhabitants of Alsace was still manifested by their use of the German language. The common discourse of the people of Flanders, and of a great part of Artois, attested their Flemish descent. The Celtic parentage of the Bretons was indicated by the customs as well as by the speech of Lower Brittany. In the south, the Provençal, the Auvergnat, the Catalan, the Gascon, and the Basque idioms bore witness to the consanguinity of the provincials of the eighteenth century with those who, a thousand years before, had been dwelling in the duchies of Aquitaine and Gascony, in the county of Toulouse, and in the marquissate of Provence. Nearly two-fifths of the subjects of Louis XV. were ignorant of the French language, though it was understood and spoken by the inhabitants of all the great provincial cities, by every person of liberal education throughout the kingdom, by every officer in the civil service of the Crown, and by every merchant engaged in general commerce. It was thus

making a rapid conquest over all rival tongues and dialects,—a rapidity increasing with every increase in trade, with the improved facilities of internal communications, with the gathering together of armies in camps or garrisons, and with the multiplication and the wider diffusion of books. As the people of France thus became more and more intelligible to each other, and lived in a more ready and frequent interchange of thought, their habits of life, their local customs, and their dominant ideas became more and more closely assimilated. The prospects of the French king and of his dynasty seemed bright, and full of promise; for everything was apparently tending to a perfect union of his people, and to a complete consolidation of his government.

The sentiment of loyalty, ripening from age to age, had become the traditionary characteristic of the French people. It had been proof against the disasters of the reign of Charles VI., the cruelties of Louis XI., the calamitous wars of his three immediate successors, the massacres of Charles IX., the self-debasement of Henry III., the insignificance of Louis XIII, the prodigalities, the persecutions, and the ruinous wars of his son, as it was still to be proof against the debaucheries and the degradation of Louis XV. The idolatrous crowd hailed him as “the well-beloved,” and he, with just surprise, inquired what they could find in him to love.

The love of the people of France to the House of Bourbon in the 17th and in the beginning of the 18th century, was certainly not a homage rendered, or due to them as the authors, or as the guardians of the political franchises of their subjects; for it is from the accession of Henry IV. that the decay and ultimate disappearance of the most important of those franchises is to be dated. Yet, if the monarchy of the Bourbons was “absolute,” it was not arbitrary, lawless, or despotic. On the contrary, it was a government of which law was



at once the basis and the general rule, and yet a government against the abuses or the usurpations of which, the law afforded no effectual security. Those institutions by which, in other lands, the rights of the people at large have been protected and maintained, had been overthrown; but though such constitutional checks or balances were now wanting, there was no want of an effective and habitual control of another kind. The king was always required, and was usually disposed, to yield a respectful deference to the habits, the opinions, and the feelings of his subjects. His authority depended to a great extent not on mere physical force, but on his personal or moral influence. His rule differed from that of the Sultan or of the Czar, almost as widely as from that of the Grand Pensionary of Holland. For though it be true that the Bourbons extinguished many of the ancient franchises of their subjects, it is also true that much of the free genius of France survived the extinction of them. Though they subverted some of the chief bulwarks of the national liberties, they cherished many of the principles for the conservation of which those defences had been originally erected. Though, according to the accepted theory, the Crown and the ministers of the Crown were alike irresponsible, and although the powers of the Crown were not seldom used oppressively, yet so habitual was the regard to the wishes and the tastes of the great body of the people with which it was worn, that they regarded the wearer of it but as the foremost of freemen, of gentlemen, and of soldiers, in a land where all were free, and courteous, and brave. The Absolute Monarchy of France therefore cannot, with any truth or reason, be considered as a despotism in which the self-indulgence of a single man was deliberately preferred to the welfare of millions. It was rather an Autocracy, tempered by manners so polite, humane, and generous, that while the higher ranks exulted in the splendour of that gilded chain, those whom it most

depressed and galled bore it with good will, and with a cheerful acquiescence.

Yet no Frenchman of the age to which I refer, attempted to investigate the legal basis on which this government stood, or to delineate the constitutional structure and relations of its various parts. The historians, jurists, and political writers of France, copious as they were on all kindred subjects, were silent upon these. They would have regarded as a kind of impiety any attempt to explore these *Arcana Imperii*, or any speculations which might have narrowed, by too distinctly defining, the limits of the royal authority. I have sought in vain for any treatise of the reigns of Louis XIV., or of his immediate successor, explanatory of the *Jura Coronæ* as they then existed. If I am right in supposing that no such treatise is to be found, it is now an irremediable defect. It leaves us to investigate the fact as distinct from the theory, and to ascertain, as best we may, what were the powers which the later kings of France did actually exercise, and what were the organs by the agency of which those powers were administered.

In the simplicity of those early times in which Hugues Capet and his immediate successors governed the Royal Domain as feudal sovereigns, and reigned over the rest of France only as feudal suzerains, the chief domestic servants of the king were also the chief ministers of his government. Such were the Chancellor, who was at once his amanuensis and the keeper of all his public and private records; such was the Chamberlain, who superintended his household; such the Seneschal, who represented him in the Feudal Court or on the feudal judgment seat; such also the Great Butler, who to the charge of the royal cellars added the management of the rest of the royal property and revenues; and such, finally, was the Constable, who to his primitive charge of maintaining peace and order in the precincts of the king's dwelling,

added the chief command of the king's forces. This primitive or domestic administration was not, however, at any time, the only body of official counsellors by whom the king was aided in the performance of his royal office. The members of the Feudal Court of the Royal Domain were, from the first, his constitutional advisers or colleagues. In that court they administered justice to the tenants in capite of the Domain, and to their sub-vassals. There they discussed and aided to decide all questions affecting the commonweal of the king and of his feudatories throughout the realm. There also they framed and adopted such general regulations as the exigencies of the king or of any part of his kingdom were supposed to require, and there especially was determined whatever related to the raising of imposts for the king's service in any part of his dominions.

In what manner the functions of the Feudal Court were reconciled and harmonised with those of the domestic administration, it is impossible to state except from conjecture. But all analogies justify the belief that the small knot of persons permanently settled in the royal palace, in constant intercourse with the king, and making public affairs the main pursuit of their lives, exercised a far greater influence over those affairs than the Feudal Court or Council; for that court met only on special occasions,—for a short time,—at great inconvenience to themselves,—without any remuneration for their attendance,—and to decide on questions with which they could have but little or no previous acquaintance, and in which they would seldom feel a very lively interest. For these reasons probably it is that the practice of holding such courts at all under the four earliest of the Capetian kings, can scarcely be detected in any existing records; nor was it till the reign of Louis VII., that (for a reason formerly explained) such courts acquired great eminence and consideration, and began to exercise an influence of which the traces are dis-

tinctly perceptible in the history of those times. At that period the great household officers, constituting the domestic administration already mentioned, appear there as established, and probably as essential, members of the Court or "Great Council," as it then began to be called. It was at that time the point of contact between the sovereign power and the aristocratic powers of the state. But in proportion as the Court or Council increased in importance, the authority exercised in it by the household officers of the king declined and eventually passed away.

In the infancy of the Capetian monarchy the "Kingdom" and the "Royal Domain" had been almost convertible terms, because those parts of France which lay beyond the precincts of the Domain could scarcely be said to lie within the limits of the Kingdom. They constituted various distinct and almost independent principalities. They were under the dominion of princes who scarcely regarded themselves as owing any allegiance to the king. He was their suzerain lord, and they his chief feudatories; but beyond this slight and almost nominal connection, there was little to distinguish the relation between him and them, from the relation which he or they bore to any foreign potentate. But when these great fiefs were one after another annexed to the Crown, and absorbed in the Royal Domain, the duties and the powers of the Feudal Court or Council received a corresponding increase. To meet the new exigencies of their position, many changes in the internal economy of the Council became inevitable. The arrangements and modes of proceeding which had been adequate to the wants of the patrimonial estates of Hugues Capet, were entirely inadequate to the wants of the monarchy as it gradually spread from Sea to Sea, and from Picardy to the Pyrenees. I have already had occasion to show how these new exigencies were encountered by the resolution of the Feudal Court into several chambers, of which the Parliament of Paris, the

Chambre des Comptes, and the Cour des Aides were the most conspicuous. Now the same causes which threw off these branches from the parent stem, operated, in process of time, so as to throw off from the branches themselves various subordinate ramifications. Thus the Feudal Court or Council was disintegrated into sections so numerous as sorely to perplex the student of this part of the history of the kingdom. It is often difficult to distinguish the functions of these derivative chambers from each other. It is difficult to conceive how they could act at all, without frequent collisions; and above all things it is difficult to interpret the all-comprising appellations of some of them, so as to render them consistent with the no less comprehensive titles of others. Passing by these dark and subtle distinctions, I will for the present confine myself to the attempt to show how the expansion of the Feudal Court into these derivative chambers or committees, tended to subvert the authority of that which I have called "the domestic administration."

The Seneschal, as I formerly stated, was at first the president of the Feudal Court when that court acted as a judicial tribunal. We have already seen how his office was parcelled out amongst the Baillis and the Prévôts of France, and how the Baillis and Prévôts were brought under the appellate jurisdiction of that great chamber of the Royal Court called the Parliament of Paris. The effect of this assumption of authority was gradually to extinguish the duties of the Seneschal, and at length to suppress even his title. He gladly exchanged an obsolete and now insignificant office for the post of Chief Bailli of France and Prévôt of the City of Paris, and thenceforward the Seneschal of the Royal Domain ceased to be numbered amongst the members of the executive government or of the Feudal Court. Precisely similar was the result of the assumption by the Chambre des Comptes and the Cour des Aides of the management and control of the public

revenue. It put an end to the ancient occupation, the once eminent dignity, and the official title of the Great Butler. He solaced himself for these losses by accepting the presidency of the *Chambre des Comptes*, and, except in that capacity, never more appeared as a member of the Feudal Court where he had once been so conspicuous. The Royal Chamberlain shared the fate of his colleagues. He had never possessed any definite political trust, but had acted in the Feudal Court merely as the associate there of the other great household officers. But when the encroachments of that court abridged the range of their ministerial duties collectively, the Chamberlain found no longer any place for his activity except within the confines of the royal palace. There he governed the officers and the menials by whom it was thronged—officers who held in fief and seigneurie the places of almoners, of equerries, of falconers, of huntsmen, of cooks, and cupbearers to the king,—and menials who actually managed the royal kitchens, and table, and field sports, and stud, and charities. Over these functionaries, so dignified or so useful, the Chamberlain ruled, not without great consideration, though he had finally abandoned the Feudal Court for the Royal household.

The kings of France observed these changes with attention, and not without anxiety. The Feudal Court had been deprived of three of the principal officers by whom the Crown had formerly been represented there. By advancing further in the same direction, the members of the Feudal Court might in the same manner expel the other royal ministers. They might even, by a kind of political suicide, destroy the Feudal Court itself. That too prolific mother might be devoured by her own too aspiring offspring. The various bureaux into which the Feudal Court had been resolved, and might yet further be broken up, might appropriate to themselves every branch of the government, and leave nothing to be done by their own parent stock,

or even by the Crown itself. A Bureaucracy might be formed dangerous to the monarchy, and France might come to live neither under the rule of her kings nor of her Feudal Court, but of an official oligarchy, composed of many separate and yet confederate committees.

That these dangers were present to the minds of the kings of France, from the 14th to the 17th centuries, I infer from the fact, that the royal ordinances, during that long period, abound with enactments apparently framed for no other purpose than to obviate and avert them. The object of those ordinances is to ascertain and defend the rights and powers of the Feudal Court or Great Council itself, as distinct from the rights and powers of its derivative chambers. Whoever shall attempt to verify this statement, will indeed often search the ordinances in vain for the precise titles of "Feudal Court," or "Great Council." That body is usually mentioned, under a different and more modern designation, as the Conseil d'Etat. But I apprehend this to be merely the substitution of one name for another. The identity of the Feudal Court, the Great Council, and the Conseil d'Etat, seems to me to admit of no reasonable doubt. That identity consists in, or may be inferred from, the sameness—of their origin, of their rank and dignity, of their general composition, of the relations they bore to the other organs of the state, and of their official duties; so far, at least, as such a coincidence of duties was compatible with the changes which time had wrought in the general structure of the government.

It was in the first year of the administration of Cardinal Mazarin,—that is, in the year 1644,—that in the name of the infant Louis XIV. was promulgated the celebrated ordinance for regulating the Conseil d'Etat, which continued, till the eve of the French Revolution, to be, in theory at least, the authoritative law upon the subject. By that ordinance the Conseil d'Etat was divided into six different chambers. Of these the first was adminis-

trative. To it were assigned the consideration of all the higher questions of practical conduct which the king might at any time have to resolve; or, as we should say, all cabinet questions. In this chamber the king himself was to preside, assisted by his principal ministers of state, and by such other members of the Conseil d'Etat as on any particular occasion he might summon to co-operate with them. To the second, or diplomatic chamber, was assigned the superintendence of all negotiations, and the direction of all military movements, the two being often intimately connected with each other. The members of this chamber were to be the same as the members of the first, but with the addition of all the Marshals of France, as often as any military question might be brought into debate there. The third, or judicial chamber, was to be composed of the Chancellor and any other counsellors whom he might call to his assistance. There were to be decided all controversies between the different organs of the government, or between the government itself and any aliens who might complain that the belligerent rights of the Crown had been unlawfully enforced against them. The fourth chamber was called the Conseil des Parties, or the Conseil Privé, where also the Chancellor presided. It was to take cognisance, first, of all cases evoked by the king from the ordinary courts; secondly, of all challenges of any judges of those courts; thirdly, of all demands for the *cassation*, or, as we say, the quashing of any judgments of any of those courts, either as being self-contradictory, or as being repugnant to any royal ordinance, or as encroaching on the lawful authority of the Conseil d'Etat. The fifth chamber was called the Conseil des Finances, and was, in effect, a tribunal, like our own Court of Exchequer, for protecting the royal revenue. The sixth, and last chamber, called the Conseil des Dépêches, was charged with duties corresponding with those of the Ministry of the Interior of our own days.



This ordinance was indeed but the prosecution and completion of that process for disintegrating the Feudal Court to which I have already adverted ; but with this essential difference. The judicial and financial chambers, which antecedently to the ordinance existed as committees or offshoots of the collective body, exercised powers which were distinct from the powers of the king's government, and which more or less tended to control and keep that government in check. But the chambers constituted under the ordinance of 1644 were all indissolubly united to the royal person, or to some of the chief ministers of the Crown. That ordinance was designed, and was well adapted to concentrate in the king or his immediate dependants every branch of the executive government which had not already been assumed by the Parliament of Paris, the *Chambre des Comptes*, or the *Cour des Aides*. It was further designed to subordinate the Parliament also and those two chambers to the Crown, as often as any particular questions might be withdrawn from their cognisance to that of the king himself, or as often as objections might be made to the competency of any of the judges, or as often as the chambers might attempt any invasion on the legislative, the administrative, or the fiscal rights of the sovereign. It was, in effect, a law designed to give great dignity and importance to the *Conseil d'Etat*, and to consolidate and perpetuate that absolute supremacy of the royal authority which it had been the constant aim of the political life of Richelieu to establish.

So far as the object of the ordinance of 1644 was to impart to the *Conseil d'Etat* a very high place in the estimation of men ambitious of rank and importance, it was completely successful. It took precedence in dignity over all the other organs of the royal or of the public will in France. A seat in the *Conseil d'Etat* was preferred by all mere candidates for honour to the most important and responsible place in the public service which was unattended by that

distinction. Many of the more powerful functionaries of the Crown sought admission to it in vain. Thus when, in all things but the name, the Abbé Dubois was Prime Minister in France, he was excluded from the Conseil d'Etat, in favour of certain *grandeos* of the royal household. No mere Secretary of State was received into it, until he had obtained the higher rank of Minister. If the support of the ambitious or the vain was to be purchased, or eminent devotedness to the public service was to be rewarded, or an otherwise unappeasable enemy was to be conciliated, a seat in the Conseil d'Etat was the coin with which such ends could be most surely compassed. That body came to be regarded very much as we ourselves at present regard the English Privy Council—that is, as resembling an order of chivalry set apart for the exaltation and embellishment of those who have rendered, or who are expected to render, some signal political service to the Crown or to the commonwealth.

Indeed the resemblance between the two institutions throws a curious light on the actual position eventually occupied in France by the Conseil d'Etat. If you look to the theory only, or to the forms of procedure only, the Privy Council of England is at this day the real government of the kingdom. Without their advice the Queen never summons, prorogues, or dissolves her parliament,—never originates an address to either of the two Houses, or a proclamation to her subjects—never makes peace or declares war—never issues a new coinage, establishes a corporation, or creates a minister, a judge, an ambassador, a bishop, or the sheriff of a county. All these, and a multitude more of such questions, are continually brought before the Privy Council in the presence of the sovereign, who seems to act on their advice, after they have seemed to go through all the outward and visible forms of deliberation. Yet, in fact, the Privy Councillors present at such meetings are as mute as the chairs on which they sit.

The long series of measures which in less than a quarter of an hour they silently advise and sanction, are then heard of by the majority of them for the first time. They are the fruit of the labours of the various executive departments of the government, where they have been slowly ripening, perhaps during many months, to receive at last, in as many minutes, all the weight which can be imparted to any act of the monarch by the names of the highest nobles in the land, and of the highest dignitaries in the cabinet or in the royal household.

Very much like this was the true position of the Conseil d'Etat within a very few years from the promulgation of the ordinance of 1644. There was, indeed, more coincidence between the form and the reality in France than now takes place in England. The occasions on which the Conseil d'Etat met really to deliberate and decide were more frequent and momentous than the occasions on which the Privy Council is ever convened for the same purpose. In each country the institution was useful as a decorous veil beneath which to conceal the real course and action of the government, and was useful also as imparting order and method to the despatch of public affairs. But, in both countries, it soon was perceived that those affairs must really be administered by a very small body of office-bearers, high in the personal confidence of the sovereign, enjoying great patronage and great emolument, and often selected from amongst the most able, and always from amongst the most aspiring, members of society.

Almost all the duties which the ordinance of 1644 formally imposed on the Conseil d'Etat and its Committees (except, indeed, their judicial duties), were, in fact, undertaken and performed by such an administration. Every motive by which kings are usually actuated,—the love of ease—the love of mystery—the love of power—the love of fame—and the love of country—concurred to recommend to Louis XIV. and his successors the privacy

and the promptitude of such an agency, in preference to the formality, the publicity, and the tedium of the modes of procedure pointed out by that ordinance. The ministerial departments of France in that age, indeed, came gradually to bear a striking resemblance to the departments of the "Domestic Administration" of the first Capetien kings. Thus, in the department of Justice, the ancient Seneschal was represented by the modern Chancellor. In that of Finance, the duties formerly belonging to the Great Butler were now discharged by the Comptroller-General. The Constable of old times had his counterpart in the Secretary of State or Minister for War, and the Secretary of State or Minister for the Royal Household corresponded to the Chamberlain of a former age. The only perfect novelties were the two remaining Secretaries of State, of whom one presided over Foreign Affairs, and the other over the affairs of the Marine and Colonies.

In France, as in England, the secretaries of state had at first, as their name implies, been nothing else than so many secret or confidential clerks, to whom the king dictated his letters or by whom such letters were copied. In France, as in England also, the general business of the whole secretariat was divided among the members of it, in reference, not to any distinction of subjects, but to the different localities to which their correspondence was addressed. Thus there were originally secretaries of state for the northern, southern, eastern, and western departments; but the designation of Secretary of State was not long in use. When the Chancellor, the Comptroller-General, and the Ministers for War, for the Royal Household, for Foreign Affairs, and for the Marine and Colonies, had divided between them all the business of those six departments, the title of Minister superseded the earlier and inferior title.

To this administration, of six great public officers, the government of France was in fact confided throughout

the whole of the 17th and 18th centuries. Whatever may have been the customary official forms, or the ostensible modes of procedure, it is the unanimous testimony of all the diplomatic correspondence, the histories, and the memoirs of those times that, from the days of Sully to those of Choiseul, the king himself and the king's confidential ministers were the real rulers of France. By him and them were projected, matured, and accomplished every considerable measure of peace and war, of foreign, domestic, commercial, and ecclesiastical policy; nor can I recollect any single instance in that age in which the Conseil d'Etat ever in fact originated, or ever seriously and effectually obstructed, any considerable measure of the king or of the king's confidential advisers. The history of France is, indeed, invariably written with little or no reference to the deliberations, real or fictitious, of the Conseil d'Etat, or rather is written very much as if such a body had not at all existed. I shall, therefore, drop any further reference to them, and shall confine myself to an attempt to indicate what were the provinces of each of the great ministers I have mentioned; omitting the ministry of Foreign Affairs, and of the Marine and Colonies, as not directly bearing on the internal state and economy of the kingdom. I begin with the Chancellor, as having been the highest and not the least important of the six great official organs through whom the royal prerogatives were exercised.

The correspondence between the Chancellor of France and the great magistrate who bears the same title in England was very imperfect. The French Chancellor was not the judge of any single tribunal, but was the general superintendent of the administration of justice by all the royal tribunals throughout the kingdom. That superintendence was, however, rather administrative than judicial. The Chancellor did not apply the law to particular cases either as an original judge or as a judge of appeal. His office was to take care that it was properly

applied to such cases by others. It was for this reason that all the members of all Sovereign Courts, and all the members of the various chambers into which those courts were divided, were subordinated to him. He governed, guided, and controlled them all. To understand aright what was the nature and what the object of a function so remote from our own habits both of thought and action, it is necessary to review the causes which gave it birth.

In a former Lecture, on the judicial history and organisation of France, I explained the growth of the courts of Bailliages or Senechaussés. In the 18th century there were more than three hundred of these tribunals in France. They were courts of first instance by which, in all cases, the original judgment was pronounced, but subject to an appeal to the Sovereign Court of the province. There were seventeen such Sovereign Courts, of which thirteen took the title of Parliaments, while the remaining four were designated as Superior Councils or as Provincial Councils. Subject to a single exception, which I do not pause to explain, the judgments of these Sovereign Courts were conclusive and irreversible — that being indeed the characteristic circumstance indicated by the title common to them all. For the same reason, that distinctive appellation was enjoyed by the *Chambre des Comptes*, by the *Cour des Aides*, by the *Cour des Monnaies*, and the *Conseil des Parties*, all of which were designated as Sovereign Courts, though they all were rather branches of the executive government, than tribunals, in the common acceptation of that term.

In all these Sovereign Courts, whether judicial or administrative, the Chancellor was entitled to preside; but he did not in fact assert that right except on occasions of peculiar difficulty and importance, and except in the *Conseil des Parties* of which he was the habitual as well as the legitimate president. He thus formed the connecting link between the executive government and the

judicial authorities. He had all, and more than all, of the powers of the Minister of Justice, as that title is understood in our own day. Under his command were the officers of what was called the *Ministère Publique*, that is, the *Procureur-Général* and his substitutes. In all penal cases they were the public prosecutors. In all civil suits it was their duty to protect the interests, not so much of the actual litigants, as of society at large, by taking care that the law was correctly understood by the judges and faithfully administered. For the judges were not, as with us, advocates promoted to the bench as the reward of professional eminence. They were an hereditary magistracy, a distinct order of men, who had acquired the judicial office either by purchase or as a patrimony transmitted to them from their ancestors. They became, what was called, the *Noblesse de la Robe*, and held a rank scarcely inferior, in popular estimation, to that of the feudal nobility, the *Noblesse de l'Epée*. Their emoluments were not great, nor was their knowledge of the law usually profound. This deficiency was, however, supplied by the *Ministère Publique*. It was a ministry to which our own institutions have nothing analogous, unless it be the office which in our courts martial is sustained by the Judge Advocate and his deputies.

The superintendence of the chancellor over the judges of France, by the agency of the *Ministère Publique*, was further rendered necessary by the privacy in which the business of the courts was conducted. The censorship of public opinion, not being brought to bear on the judges, this other kind of censorship was substituted for it. In civil suits, indeed, the points at issue were debated in open court, and the "conclusions," as they were called, of the *Ministère Publique* were pronounced in the same manner. But the judges afterwards deliberated in secret, and when at length they pronounced their decisions, they did not always vindicate them by a statement of their

motives. On the trial of persons charged with crimes the proceedings were still more withdrawn from the public eye. The accused and the witnesses were all examined in secret and apart from each other. The pleadings for the prosecution and for the defence were not pronounced *vivâ voce*, but were exhibited in writing ; and torture was not seldom employed to extort from the prisoner a confession of the imputed crime, or an indication of the witnesses by whom it could be established against him. The nature and amount of the punishment to be inflicted was determined not by certain and inflexible rules, but by a judicial discretion of which the limits were dangerously wide and indefinite. Now, the chief security of the people at large against the oppression of which such a system of judicial procedure might otherwise have been prolific, consisted in the vigilance with which the superintending authority of the Chancellor, or of his subordinates, was exercised over all the royal tribunals of France.

That authority was also a necessary safeguard against the vagueness and the obscurity of the law itself. The jurisprudence of the whole kingdom rested to a great extent on local customs, which however, to the south of the Loire, were in many respects superseded by the *Droit Ecrit*, that is, the Roman Law, and the various municipal codes. But, to the north of the Loire, those customs were slightly, if at all, controlled by any *Droit Ecrit*, or by positive enactments of any kind, but were reduced in each separate province, city, or bailliage into a compilation or *coustumier* peculiar to itself. Each Parliament also established, within the local sphere of its own jurisdiction, a body of police and other regulations extending to that particular district and to it alone. Thus the *Corpus Juris* of France was made up of a multitude of dissimilar and incongruous parts, and hence resulted a continual conflict of laws throughout the various judicial divisions of the realm. Now to understand the whole of this discordant



mass of laws, and to carry it into effect, without obliterating the lines of demarcation between the various component members of it, was a task of the most extreme difficulty — a task indeed which would have been utterly impracticable to several distinct courts, each exercising a supreme and independent authority, without the constant superintendence and control of some regulating and corrective power common to them all. That power was vested in the Chancellor and his subordinate officers.

To ourselves, the absolute and complete separation of the judicial and the executive departments of the state, is so familiar, that we are apt to regard it as an elementary principle of government, and are perplexed to conceive of any well ordered national polity in which the opposite habit can have prevailed. But in monarchical France the difficulty would rather have been to understand how any civilised commonwealth could exist, in which they to whom were committed the enactment and the execution of the law, should stand entirely aloof from all interference with the forensic administration of it. In either country the same propensity was felt to elevate the usages of one people, into rules indispensable to the well-being of every other people.

Certain however it is, that, notwithstanding their subordination to one of the chief ministers of the Crown, the supreme tribunals of France enjoyed and merited the public confidence; and that the judges who presided in them were not a whit inferior in integrity, or in the reputation for integrity, to the judges of the four courts of Westminster. Amidst their ceaseless relations with the government in the 18th century, no reproach of a mercenary or corrupt abuse of their high trust was ever cast upon them as a body by the most acrimonious of their opponents. Not only were they actually exempt from any such suspicion, but they were effectually sheltered from the danger of it, by their own high sense of

honour, by the consciousness of ancestral and of personal dignity, by the general independence of their fortunes, and by a wholesome dread of the infamy which would have punished any such violation of the first duty of their sacred offices.

Our national prepossessions do not prepare us to estimate aright the social importance of the judicial and legal institutions of France under the last three Capetien kings. It is not, however, too much to say that, collectively, they possessed an amount of wealth, of influence, and of authority, exceeding that of any other of the incorporated or associated bodies of the kingdom. Their numbers were exceedingly great, and they were dispersed throughout every considerable city and province. The judicial corps at Paris exceeded 3000 persons, who are collectively designated as "officers of justice," and these were attended by a body of mere ministerial agents at least as numerous. If each of the seventeen Sovereign Courts of the kingdom had been constituted on the same scale, the department of the state over which the Chancellor presided would have comprised nearly 120,000 functionaries. From this estimate, however, a large deduction is to be made on the ground that the tribunals of the capital were of far greater importance, and must have possessed much more extensive establishments, than those of any provincial city; while, on the other hand, an addition is to be made to it of all the functionaries in attendance on the courts of first instance beyond the limits of Paris or the provincial capitals. There can be little risk of error, therefore, in ascribing to the Chancellor of France a body of more than a hundred thousand dependants throughout the kingdom, all of whom were members of the judicial hierarchy of which he was the head,—a fact to which I refer chiefly as affording some measure of the dignity and importance of his office.

But, if measured by that standard, the office of the

Comptroller-General of the Finances was more dignified and important still. In the middle of the 18th century, France was divided into thirty financial districts called *Généralités*. Each of them was placed under the immediate authority of an officer who bore the title of *Intendant*. Every *généralité* was divided into two or more sub-intendancies, over each of which was placed a sub-intendant. This was one of the many innovations in the organism of the French government, of which Richelieu was the author. Just as, in an earlier age, the great feudal princes had been succeeded in the administration of the affairs of the different provinces by the governors appointed by the Crown, so Richelieu superseded the governors by the appointment of intendants. The governors indeed were left by him in possession of their titles and a large part of their emoluments and authority. But the complete extinction of their power was evidently approaching from the day which witnessed the first appearance of this new order of public functionaries. For the intendant was the delegate of the king to the province for which he acted, and was empowered to exercise there every royal prerogative which could not be exercised there by the king in person, or by the chief ministers of the Crown. The intendants held their places on the immediate nomination of the sovereign, and only during his pleasure, because theirs was too high a trust to be granted on any more enduring tenure. Those places were never sold, because they were too important to be granted to any but persons of approved ability. All the intendants were placed in immediate subordination to the comptroller-general, because they were intrusted with the management of the revenue of their respective localities. The intendants on the frontier provinces, being also charged with military duties, were in that respect under the direction of the minister for war also.

All the lighter literature of France in the 18th century attests the unpopularity of the intendants in that

age. But they were nowhere the objects of so much ill will as in the provinces, in which the people enjoyed no representative franchises, and which were distinguished as the Pays d'Election. For in the Pays d'Election the revenue laws were enacted by the unaided prerogative of the king, and were carried into effect by the king's officers. In those provinces, on the other hand, in which provincial States General were convened, all fiscal enactments originated with those States, or were sanctioned by them. The intendant announced to the States what was the amount of the demand made by the king on the bounty of their constituents, and their concession to that demand assumed the specious name of a *Don Gratuit*. It was, however, gratuitous only in name; for although in theory it might be diminished, or modified, or even rejected altogether, yet any resolute use of that theoretical power would have been eminently hazardous to the continued existence of the power itself. It was a privilege to be acknowledged and extolled, but hardly to be exercised. It was rather a theme for popular eloquence than a rule of practical conduct. The provincial States habitually granted the funds demanded from them with occasional, and not very important, exceptions. You must not, however, suppose that their financial powers had no substantial weight or real value. The provincial States apportioned among the contributors the burden laid upon the province at large. They determined by what ways and means the requisite funds should be raised. They borrowed money on the security of the provincial revenue. Through the agency of their own officers, they superintended the actual expenditure of so much of that revenue as was appropriated to their own local purposes. It was therefore requisite that their authority should never be altogether suspended; and consequently, during the intervals of their sessions, the provincial States were represented by delegates chosen by themselves from amongst their own body, and who, when

so chosen, were invested with all their own administrative and financial powers. Thus the collection of the local imposts, and the actual expenditure of a considerable part of them, was always confided in the Pays d'Etat to persons deeply interested in the welfare of the province,—to persons qualified for that service by local knowledge,—and to persons who by the discharge of it qualified themselves to assist largely in the deliberations of the constituent body, as, from time to time, they resumed the conduct of their own affairs in their own persons.

In the middle of the 18th century there were in France thirteen Pays d'Etat, of which Languedoc, Bretagne, Bourgogne, and Artois were the most considerable. In every such province the Clergy, the Noblesse, and the Commons met as distinct orders in the provincial Assembly; but in all other respects there was a wide difference between the provincial States in whatever respected their constitution, their powers, and their methods of procedure. Neither was there any approach to equality in the pressure of the public burdens upon them. It was much less severe in some than in others of the Pays d'Etat, and was much less severe in all the Pays d'Etat than in any of the Pays d'Election. The pressure, whether more or less burdensome, was borne with general impatience throughout every part of the kingdom.

The comptroller-general of the finances had under his superintendence not merely the intendants of the various provinces, but also the receivers, whether general or special, of all direct imposts, and the farmers general of all indirect contributions. The nature of these sources of revenue have been indicated in a former Lecture. They were such as to bring every class of society, every district and city, and almost every household in France, into contact with the comptroller-general or with some one or other of his subordinates. He filled the exact place which is occupied in England by the Lord High

Treasurer, and by the commission for executing his office; except, indeed, that there were no representatives of the people at large, by whom his fiscal measures were to be sanctioned, or to whom he was responsible for the execution of them.

The great difficulty of the comptroller-general was, at all times, how to supply the waste of war. But the military administration did not belong to him. It was the province of the Secretary of State, or minister who presided over the war department. In order to explain what were the royal prerogatives exercised through that agency in the 18th century, it is necessary to advert briefly to the manner in which the power of the sword was vested in the Capetien kings in earlier times.

The word Ban originally meant a citation or summons. By an obvious metonymy it came to mean, the persons cited or summoned. Thus the military Ban of the feudal age was an armament composed of the royal tenants in capite, and of all their vassals and sub-vassals, who, by the conditions of their tenure, were bound to bear arms in defence of the person or the rights of the common Suzerain. The Arrière Ban was composed of all free persons being subjects of the Crown, who were bound, not as feudal tenants, but as lieges, to appear in arms against any invader of the realm. The Ban were gentlemen, and served on horseback. The Arrière Ban was originally composed entirely of citizens, and served on foot. Neither the Ban nor the Arrière Ban received any pay. In appearance they cost the king nothing, but in reality they were, of all troops, the most costly. It was their privilege to live at free quarters, to set their creditors at defiance, and to pillage wherever they went. Yet so distasteful was this service to those who engaged in it, that by the beginning of the 14th century it had been superseded throughout the greater part of France by a commutation tax, to which many cities, and

many extensive districts, had voluntarily subjected themselves.

Thus the Ban, or feudal levy, survived the Arrière Ban which was replaced by troops hired by means of the commutation tax. Those hired troops are the Routiers and Cotereaux (Roadsters and Coasters), of whom such constant mention is made in the early history of France. Like the Condottieri of Italy or the Landsknechte of Germany, they made war their proper calling, and sold their swords to the highest bidder. So soon as the French kings had effectually secured the services of these troops as a regular force the old feudal Ban became merely a Landwehr or auxiliary militia.

I had formerly occasion to show how the States General of 1426 and of 1439 placed the seigniorial tailles at the disposal of Charles VII., to enable him to disband the Routiers and Cotereaux, and to enlist a regular standing army, which should be subjected to strict discipline—which should be dependent on the king alone—and with which the feudal lords should have no right of interference. I showed how, by his Ordonnance sur la Gendarmerie, Charles carried the views of the States General into effect. It is now to be added that the army which he proceeded to raise was chiefly composed of Swiss, Scotch, and German adventurers. In the wars of religion of the 16th century, we everywhere meet with these persons playing a principal part. For the regular military service of the Crown was distasteful to the Frenchmen of that age, partly because it was antagonistic to the habits in which the feudal lords and the licentious soldiery had been so long accustomed to indulge, and partly because the high and unbroken spirit of the French people disdained the restraints of strict military discipline. They were keenly animated by the religious and other passions of the day, and could ill submit to officers who attempted to guide or to moderate their zeal. Thus the ranks of the infantry in the wars of religion

were filled rather with the well trained mercenaries of the rest of Europe, than with the unruly partisans either of the catholic or the protestant princes. The cavalry which fought under their banners was, however, composed of French noblemen commanding their own tenantry and retainers.

After the *Ordonnance sur la Gendarmerie* had given to France a standing army with a regular provision for its maintenance, Francis I. gave to that force a new organisation. He divided the kingdom into seven military departments, in every one of which was to be enlisted six regiments of a thousand men each, comprising collectively a force of 42,000 men, at the head of whom was placed a commander in chief with the title of Colonel-General. But the plan of recruiting these regiments from particular districts, or with any precise limitation of their number, soon gave place to the more obvious plan of recruiting them wherever they were to be had. The colonel-general also was but a short-lived office, and the Constable of France resumed, in the person of De Luynes, all his ancient command over the royal forces. When the powers of the Crown passed into the hands of Richelieu, he permanently abolished the too exalted and dangerous office of Constable, and substituted for it the rank, since so illustrious, of the Marshals of France. But it did not belong to his kingly spirit to repose in the invention or distribution of honours, or to forget the higher ends to which all such distinctions should be subservient. Accordingly Richelieu became the founder of barracks, of magazines, of military chaplaincies, and tribunals, of a medical staff, and of a regular commissariat. In short, to him belongs the praise of having first reduced to practice the distinction between the command of armies in the field and the management of the various departments charged with whatever relates to their equipment, their discipline, their sustenance, and their moral and religious training.



To these improvements of Richelieu were added by Louvois others of no light importance. He founded schools of military education. He separated the Ordnance and the Line into two bodies distinct from each other in whatever related to their training, their tactics, and their promotion. By him was established the practice of granting pensions to invalids, and of maintaining hospitals for veterans. To him also was due the founding of the military order of St. Louis, where, though the Grand Cross was reserved for officers of the highest rank, there were titles and decorations to be won by the humblest of the common soldiers.

The French army thus became a distinct society in the State. The Ban and Arrière Ban had ceased to exist except as historical recollections. Yet in the 18th century the army of France was still composed of two distinct elements; that is, of the regiments of the line, who were recruited of their own free-will in every part of the kingdom; and of a militia, who were raised, by a general conscription, to serve during a limited period in their own provinces, or at least within the limits of the realm. The old feudal habits had not, however, lost their hold on this part of the national institutions; since not only the highest dignities in the order of St. Louis, but all the highest commands in the service, were still strictly and exclusively reserved for persons of noble birth. The king was the sole dispenser of military rank and honours; and, in truth, to the officers of his army he dispensed little else. The military service was the only profession in which members of the privileged orders could engage without disparagement to their ancestral dignity. Their pay was small, their fatigues and dangers incessant, and their reward was chiefly found in those distinctions which appeal to the imagination or the moral sentiments of mankind. The consequence was, that the army was a body over which the king could exercise no harsh authority.

To have treated the officers of it without habitual respect and studied courtesy, would have been to dissolve the spell which attached them to the Crown, and on which the security of the Crown itself depended.

Among those habits of courtesy is to be numbered the admission of all the Marshals of France into the Conseil d'Etat to deliberate on all military questions. The minister for war took his seat among them in appearance as their subordinate. But their authority over him was rather ostensible than real. In form he might seem to be only executing their resolves. In fact, they merely gave a formal sanction to his decisions. The control of the government, through that minister, over all the forces of the kingdom, was not less absolute and complete a hundred years ago than it is at present. The real difference is, that now it is open and avowed, and that then it was circuitous and disguised.

But at that period the government itself was conducted in the recesses of a palace the secrets of which were darkly surmised and little understood by the subject multitude. They knew, indeed, that a secretary of state, or minister for the royal household, presided within its walls, but beyond those walls the real nature of his functions was seldom accurately understood, and especially because they had but an obscure and indistinct relation to the title he bore. As time has rather increased than diminished the darkness, it is the more necessary to supply the explanation.

The minister for the royal household in the 18th century, like the chamberlain of the early Capetien kings, presided over all the noble personages and all the menial attendants who collectively executed the offices, whether titular or real, which were due to the persons of the king and of his family. He was a kind of high priest of a temple in which much idolatrous homage was daily rendered. Or he may be said to have been the stage

manager of a theatre on which the king himself sustained the most conspicuous character in the centre of a vast throng of inferior actors. There were princes of the blood—dukes and peers—nobles of illustrious descent,—court dignitaries,—ecclesiastics,—heralds,—the holders and the seekers of public office,—wits and authors,—idlers and intriguers,—sharppers and money lenders. This motley assemblage and their royal head lived together under a code of laws peculiar to themselves. The institutes of etiquette were as supreme in the palace of Versailles as were those of Justinian in the palace of Justice; and of those laws the minister of the royal household was the chief administrator.

But the facilities of access to the king, which this employment gave to that minister, was continually enlarging the range of his jurisdiction. Thus he insensibly became the real though unavowed patron of the ecclesiastical benefices in the gift of the Crown. Amidst these were all the bishoprics, all the greater abbeys, and all the priories of France. The name of every person who was judged eligible for such promotion was inscribed in a book called the "*Feuille des Bénéfices*." When vacancies happened, the minister for the royal household laid that book before the king, to ascertain the name which it might please him to select from the pages of it. But they who habitually ascertain the royal pleasure on any subject rarely fail to guide the decisions in which they seem merely to acquiesce, and the minister of the royal household was seldom so bad a courtier as not to possess himself of that advantage. Nor was his dispensation of royal favours confined merely to the sacerdotal order. He was the channel through which were announced all other acts of royal grace and bounty, passing from the sovereign to any of his subjects; nor did any one doubt that he frequently suggested as well as announced them. He had terrors also to dispense, as well as allure-

ments. By him were issued those formidable missives called "*Lettres de Cachet*," under which any person might be detained in a state prison indefinitely, not only on account of real or apprehended offences against the majesty of the Crown, but also to rescue any noble family from the disgrace which they might anticipate from the misconduct of any of their kindred if left at large. Nor was this arbitrary prerogative really unpopular in France. It struck chiefly, though not exclusively, either at those who were playing the deep and dangerous game of ambition, of which this was one of the risks, or at those whose high rank elevated them above the sympathies of the multitude, who might therefore seem, with some justice, to be exposed to hazards, from which the multitude were exempt.

But of all the functions of the minister of the royal household, the most momentous was his superintendence of the protestant subjects of the king. As I shall have occasion hereafter to explain, one of the persecuting ordinances of Louis XIV. had been prepared and vindicated by a preamble, reciting that, at the date of that ordinance, all French Protestants had already either renounced their heresy or quitted the kingdom. Hence followed the conclusion that any person adhering to that heresy, at any later period, within the realm, must be either a relapsed heretic, or a returned fugitive, or a recent renegade from the Roman Catholic faith. On either of these suppositions he was liable to the most terrible punishments, and to such disabilities as placed him *hors de la loi*. Such persons were as completely deprived of all legal rights as the beasts of the field. They could maintain no action for the redress of any wrong. No notice could be taken by any court of justice of their births, or baptisms, or marriages, or deaths. They had lost all their legal personality, and yet they were amenable, as heretics, to punishments of every degree of severity, of which death was not the direct and imme-

diate result. It was vain for the sufferers to urge that they were neither returned fugitives, nor relapsed heretics, nor recent apostates, but persons who had been born and bred up in the Protestant faith, and who had maintained it without interruption from their infancy. It was vain to allege that there were at least a million such protestants in France. This was to dispute the truth of the apology which formed the preamble of the royal ordinance under which they suffered. The minister of the royal household might not tolerate an allegation so injurious to the honour of the prince he served. It was his melancholy office to enforce the strict execution of the law, and to inflict torments on those who worshipped with Calvin, while he afforded a complete impunity to those who, with Spinoza and Voltaire, were undermining the foundations of divine worship in all its forms.

From the preceding brief and rapid notices of the structure of the executive government of France at different periods, it follows, that the systems in use under Hugues Capet and under Louis XIV., had a remarkable resemblance to each other. In so far as the ends and objects with a view to which those monarchs ruled their kingdom, were the same, so far the instruments by the agency of which they ruled, were also the same — identical in substance, though differing in names. In the eleventh, as in the seventeenth century, each of the four departments of Justice, of War, of Finance, and of the Royal Household, was placed under the management of a single minister, as its presiding head. In the seventeenth century indeed, there were also ministers for foreign affairs, and for the marine and colonies, as doubtless there would have been in the eleventh century also, if France had then had any foreign relations, or maritime or colonial dominion. In neither age was there any ministry of the interior, that function being divided, both in the one and in the other, between the ministers of finance and of the royal household.

This return of the French government in the full maturity of the Capetien dominion, to the mould in which it had been cast when that dominion was still in its infancy, is a fact meriting particular attention. It shows how well adapted such an organisation is to the exigencies of a purely monarchical power. It shows why it has been adopted by all the monarchies of continental Europe. It shows that the logical precision, and luminous method in the conduct of public affairs, which distinguish the French people now, is an inheritance from their remote ancestors; and it shows how, after the boasted extinction of all feudalism, some of the feudal habits of the earliest times still flourish in France, by the depth of the roots which they then struck into the national mind. Both the Orleans and the Napoleon dynasties have been served, though under new designations, by "Chancellors and Great Butlers," and "Constables," and "Royal Chamberlains," corresponding with those of the founder of the third race of the kings of France. In earlier as well as in later times the concentration of all the powers of the state in the hands of the monarch, was the end and object of that administrative polity. It was indeed an end which could be but very imperfectly accomplished by the French kings so long as they were nothing else than feudal seigneurs of the royal domain, and suzerains of all the exterior fiefs of the realm. The feudal dominion, barbarous as it was, presented a powerful and as it might seem, an insuperable obstacle, to the concentration of all the attributes of sovereignty. That dominion had at least a certain cohesion, and a well devised correspondence between its component parts. The great mass of the population—disarmed; poverty-stricken, attached to the soil, and widely dispersed over thinly-peopled territories—were kept in quietude and bondage by the petty chiefs and their military retainers. Each of the higher steps of the social ladder, from the chatelain to the supreme

suzerain, was placed in strict and effective subordination to the next immediately above it, so that the whole series of gradations was well cemented, and compact, and firm. It was a reign of terror, administered with relentless but irresistible energy. . There was then a national unity of the supreme power, but it was a unity in plurality; a power distributed throughout all the seigneurs of that ascending and descending series. But when the feudal despotism was overthrown by the various agencies to which I have adverted in former Lectures, then were brought together all the elements of a new national unity as firm and compact, but far more harmonious, than that which had subsisted during the two centuries which immediately followed the elevation of Hugues Capet. Such were the enfranchised communes, the emancipated serfs, the States General, and the aristocratic rights of the privileged orders. I have attempted to show how it happened that instead of a unity resulting from the willing concert and co-operation of all the organs of the commonwealth for the same common purposes, there arose a unity resulting from the subjection of all those organs to a single and absolute authority. It was a unity by which the municipalities, the tribunals, the armies, the Provincial States, the States General of France, and even the Gallican Church itself, were all moulded into the form of one great national machine of which a solitary will directed the use and dictated the movements.

If the effect of this kind of unity was to promote the aggrandisement of the monarchy, and the success of the national arms in aggressive warfare, it had also the effect of isolating the sovereign power. Louis XIV. and his successors commanded an army to which all resistance was hopeless,—exercised a patronage by which any amount of corruption could be practised,—controlled all the highest tribunals so as to disarm the law of its rightful supremacy,—and were irresponsible to any free public bodies,

legislative or municipal, and even to public opinion, every unwelcome utterance of which they could suppress or punish. But the summit of human society was so much detached from its basis, and rested upon it so insecurely, as to be evidently unable to endure the shock of the first tempest by which it might be assailed. This incongruity between the spirit of the age and the spirit of the government of France, throughout the first half of the 18th century, was as far as possible concealed under the numerous fictions in which that government was embodied, strange as was the contrast between those fictions and the reality. It was not merely a fiction but a falsehood that the Conseil d'Etat was the habitual source of all the more considerable decisions of the Crown,—that the parliaments were independent in the exercise of either their political or their judicial functions — that the bishops were really chosen on the advice of a Council of Conscience composed of learned and impartial ecclesiastics — that the grants of the Provincial States were spontaneous,—or that the grants of the sacerdotal order were freely made. Nay, it was not seldom either a fiction, or a falsehood, that the offices nominally borne by the great ministers of state were really discharged by them; for in the discharge of the duties of those offices they were often superseded by the king himself, by his favourites, or by his concubines. Fictions are indeed inseparable from all political government. Forms must often survive the spirit which gave them birth, and which they were at first intended to express. Between what is ostensible and what is genuine in the structure of the commonwealth, the coincidence can never be perfect, and the changes made by time can be but slowly overtaken by the changes made in the external and avowed organisation of the body politic. We must bear with such fictions so long as they express theoretical truths, but not when they express what is practically false. The government of France, in the 17th and 18th centuries,



was dishonoured and enfeebled by the systematic deceptions under which the real administration of public affairs was misrepresented and disguised.

The courtesy and kindness of demeanour by which absolute power was reconciled to that sensitive and gallant race was yet a further indication of the instability of the tenure on which that power was held. The king virtually became the courtier of his own courtiers, and the flatterer of his own people. The character he had to sustain was too artificial to be always well performed. Bound to do his best to please, he was of course often giving unintentional offence. As a security against it, his palace and his person were invested with the barriers of etiquette. Positive laws prescribed the exact measure of the courtesies to which every one who approached him was entitled. Exact parsimony in the distribution of such favours became indispensable, and these restraints deprived him of the comforts which belong to the unaffected ease and simplicity of domestic life. To Louis XIV. this burden was comparatively light, for he loved to tread the public stage, where he won and merited the applause due to a consummate actor. His successors took refuge from this habitual display either in licentious indulgences or in unkingly recreations, amidst the familiar few before whom they could lay aside their royal state and pageantry. Louis XIV. therefore was surrounded by idolaters, and his successors by iconoclasts.

It was not, however, either in political fictions, or in royal manners, that the stern simplicity of the political mechanism which I have described chiefly indicated its presence and its formidable character. When the municipalities, the communal liberties, the States General, the political power of the parliaments, the ancestral dignities of the privileged orders, and the influence of the Conseil d'Etat, had all declined, and had left all legislative and administrative power in the hands of the king and his ministers, a

tyranny was introduced which had not a little in common with the blind despotism of an oriental monarchy. The intendants and sub-intendants of the 17th and 18th centuries became scarcely less formidable than the feudal seigneurs of the 11th and 12th centuries. Turn over any of the volumes on the state of France compiled by the Count de Boulainvilliers for the information of the aged Louis XIV., and you will find there the intendants and sub-intendants depicted as exercising an uncontrolled authority over the substance, the families, and the lives of the common people; as seizing their property without restraint; as compelling their children to enlist in the army; and as punishing all resistance by the gaol, the gibbet, and the wheel. Aided by the vast military force of the Crown, and by the means of corruption which it commanded, these oppressors, as you will see in that dismal record, were able first to crush and then to despise all opposition. These statements are true, however, chiefly of the Pays d'Election. The Pays d'Etat, enjoying much of the semblance and some of the realities of self government, were able to encounter the intendants and sub-intendants if not always with complete success, at least always in such a manner as to prevent the grosser forms of rapacity and abuse. The immense importance of infusing into the monarchical system the element of popular control was so impressively exhibited to Boulainvilliers and to the young Duke of Burgundy, his associate in those researches, that the extension to the whole of France of the franchises of the Pays d'Etat became the favourite project over which they jointly brooded, and which, if he had survived his grandfather, the Duke of Burgundy would probably have attempted to establish. The same scheme was at a later time entertained by Turgot and by Malesherbes in the hope of averting the impending ruin of the monarchy. It is vain to inquire what would have been the probable success of such a measure. The revolution overtook the king at the head

of a political system which no genius or courage could have long sustained, and required him to expiate the error committed by his ancestors when they supposed that they were really augmenting the strength and the true greatness of the throne in proportion as they succeeded in destroying or abridging the franchises of their people.

## LECTURE XXII.

ON THE ABSOLUTE MONARCHY, AS ADMINISTERED BY  
HENRY IV. AND BY RICHELIEU.

HAVING in my last Lecture attempted to show what was the legal constitution of the Absolute Monarchy of France, I propose in the present, and in some following Lectures, to pass briefly in review the spirit and the general designs with which that government was administered by some of the most eminent of the various statesmen on whom that high office successively devolved. If the time which our academical laws have placed at my disposal had been sufficient for the purpose, I should gladly have considered the progress of the Bourbon dynasty under each in succession of its great administrators—Henry IV., and Sully, and Richelieu, and Mazarin, and Colbert, and Louvois, and Louis XIV. in person, and Fleury, and Choiseul. But the local enactments to which we are all subject here, compel me to contract that design, and to be satisfied if I can bridge over, as it were, the interval between the wars of religion and the wars of the Fronde, by a rapid survey of the successive stages of the policy of the rulers of France during that period.

It has been said of Henry IV., with equal truth and force, that he was L'Hôpital in arms. The principles which had been asserted by the wisdom and the eloquence of the great chancellor became triumphant by the foresight and the conquests of the great king. In an age of wild disorder and overwhelming calamity, he was raised up to restore his kingdom to affluence and to peace. He appeared to rescue his protestant subjects from the tyranny which had so long denied to them the freedom of conscience. He came to give a firm basis to the national policy, and to open to his people at large a new direction, and a wider scope, for the martial energies by which they had hitherto been at once so highly, and so ineffectually, distinguished. For these high offices he was qualified by great talents, and by many virtues. With a capacity large enough to embrace all the social, military, and political interests of his dominions, he combined that practical good sense and flexibility of address, without which there is no safe descent from the higher regions of thought to the real business of life. The intuitive promptitude, and the enduring stability, of his resolutions attested at once his large experience in affairs, and his wide survey both of the resources at his command, and of the contingencies to which he was exposed. He possessed that kind of mental instinct which advances by the shortest path to what is at once useful and possible, and which turns aside, with unhesitating decision, from any illusive and impracticable scheme. Never was a great innovator more characterised by practical wisdom; and never did such wisdom assume a more attractive aspect. His manners exhibited all the graces of his native land in their most captivating form. Delighted with his bonhomie, his gaiety, and his frankness, his subjects not only forgave his vices, but even found in them a fascination the more. They smiled at the scandalous amours of their gallant monarch as a not unbecoming tribute paid by human

greatness to human infirmity. If they looked with awe on the desperate valour of his enterprises, on the inflexible rigour of his discipline, or on the soaring ambition of his political designs, they were reconciled to the stern character of the prince by the ever-flowing and genuine sensibilities of the man. If his lofty sense of his personal and ancestral dignity sometimes gave an austere aspect to his intercourse with his people, that pride of birth did but enhance the charm of his quick sympathy with the feelings and interests of the meanest of them. And, above all the rest, every Frenchman loved and admired in Henry, the lover and admirer of France; and became patriotically blind to the faults of his renegade and debauched, but patriot, king.

And even now, when the spell is broken, and we may look back on the life of Henry IV. with judicial impartiality, and reprobate the apologies which would have elevated his crimes into virtues, we cannot conceal from ourselves the fact, that he conferred on his people benefits which well entitled him to their lasting gratitude.

For, first, Henry of Navarre was the founder of religious toleration in France. Until the Edict of Nantes, there had been many truces, but no real peace, between the adherents of Rome and the followers of Calvin. To compel all the fragments of the Christian Church to coalesce into one body, each member of which should hold the same opinions, and worship under the same forms, had been the inflexible policy of all his predecessors. To acquiesce in their separation, and yet to maintain each section in the nearest possible approach to an equality both of civil and religious privileges, was the no less inflexible design of Henry. His charter could not, indeed, restore unity to the Church, but it established, on what seemed a secure basis, the unity of the State. The two religions were thenceforward placed under ecclesiastical laws widely

differing from each other, but under a civil law common to them both.

The second great praise of the first monarch of the Bourbon line is that of having rescued France from the abyss of bankruptcy and financial ruin which it had been involved by the improvidence of the house of Valois. For the completion of that great work the larger share of honour is, indeed, due to Sully; and I will not pause to repeat what I have already had occasion to offer on the subject of his fiscal administration. But from his own *Economies Royales* we sufficiently learn that, unaided by the magnanimity, the self-denial, and the affection of the king, not even the zeal, the courage, and the sagacity of the great minister would have accomplished that Herculean labour.

The third title of Henry to the place which he has ever held among the benefactors of France, has at all times been acknowledged by Frenchmen with more enthusiasm than any other of his services. He was the first of her kings who had at once the discernment to perceive how high a station belonged to her in the European commonwealth, and the energy to devise the methods by which that rank might be effectually vindicated. The project of a great Christian republic, at the head of which the eldest son of the Church was to take his stand, was, it is true, but an amusement for the imaginations of Henry and of Sully. Yet, like other dreams, it had a basis in waking realities. Richelieu, Louis XIV., and Napoleon were but, each in his turn, the practical interpreters of the vision with which the readers of the *Economies Royales* are familiar. It contemplated the substitution of the French, for the Austrian, preponderance in Europe. It anticipated the great principle of that equilibrium of national forces which, half a century later, formed the basis of the Treaty of Westphalia. It was one of those prolific ideas which, when conceived by genius, matured by experience, and planted in a kindly soil, can never cease to affect the

condition and prospects of mankind, but will, from age to age, yield abundant, though, perhaps, sometimes deadly fruits. The knife of the assassin arrested the execution of it by Henry himself; but, to this moment, the descendants of those over whom he ruled cling with undiminished passion to the hope which he first excited — the hope that, by the propagation of their language and opinions, by the skill of their diplomatists, and by the terror of their arms, France may at length acquire an authority, or an influence, like that of Imperial Rome, over every land in which, in his age, Papal Rome had established her spiritual dominion.

It is not, however, on these grounds alone, that the reign of Henry IV. occupies a memorable position in the constitutional history of his country. It was a period of great consummations and of great beginnings. Like some inland sea which is at once the receptacle of many converging, and the source of as many diverging, streams, it was interposed between two æras strikingly contrasted with each other. It marked the close of the mediæval sovereignty, and the commencement of the modern monarchy, — the first a dominion of undefined rights, of unsettled habits, and of a fluctuating policy, — the second, a government absolute in fact and in right, severely consistent in its arbitrary principles, but elaborately adapted to the various exigencies of a civilised commonwealth. The hitherto unorganised elements of the state were now, for the first time, reduced into a political unity. The invidious distinctions of earlier times now began to give place to social equality; and the slow, though stedfast, progress of that unity and of that equality may be considered as the subject of the whole of the subsequent history of France. In the triumph of these two principles consists the peculiar distinction, and the chief boast, of the French polity, whether monarchical or republican, of our times; and, therefore, the age of Henry IV., when



considered as the origin of these great national characteristics, demands, and will repay, the most diligent attention.

For, first, the student of that reign will discover that it was the period when all legislative, executive, and administrative powers were first accurately distributed amongst the various ministers of the Crown, and carefully concentrated in the Crown itself. Secondly; he will learn that it was then that the nobles, ceasing to be the rivals, became the courtiers, of their sovereign, and exchanged much of their ancient power and dignity for an accession of splendour and of wealth. Thirdly; from the same epoch may be dated the appearance and the recognition of the noblesse of the robe; that is, of roturiers, who, being ennobled by the hereditary tenure of judicial offices, attracted to themselves much of the aristocratic importance which had, till then, been enjoyed exclusively by the territorial nobility. Fourthly; about the same period may be discerned the first development of that moral and intellectual influence of men of letters, in the presence of which the influence of illustrious birth and of traditionary honours gradually waned and lost its hold on the reverence of mankind. Fifthly; then, also, were seen to arise a class of monied men, who, by fortunes acquired in commerce, eclipsed the magnificence of the great lords who had inherited their estates through many generations. And, finally, in the reign of Henry IV. also, the different classes of society were fused together in a manner till then unknown, partly in consequence of the participation of all ranks in the profound excitement and devotional fervour of the religious wars, and partly in consequence of the protracted and intimate association with each other, which had prevailed between the three orders of the States General at Blois, at Orleans, and at Paris, and between the constituent bodies who had been so often convened for the election of the deputies to those States in all the different bailliages of the kingdom.

But while these various causes were concentrating the powers of the government, and approximating the different classes of Frenchmen to one common level, social equality was not to establish her dominion in France, except at the expense of bitter animosities and sanguinary contests. The aristocratic and plebeian rivalries, which had been suppressed during the wars of religion, had not been then extinguished. Those meaner passions were striking new and vigorous roots, even then, when the external indications of them had, for the moment, disappeared. While brought into an unwonted intimacy by the prosecution together of their joint objects, political or religious, the nobles and the commons were each taking the measure of the strength and the pretensions of the other. The privileged orders were then taught some humiliating lessons of the real inferiority of their own powers; and, at the same time, the Tiers Etat became aware of their own comparative weight and importance in the state. The conservative possessors of rank were exasperated by the fear of new encroachments. The aggressive aspirants after distinction were animated by the hopes of new conquests; and when the great confederacy of the League was dissolved, there had become distinctly perceptible the omens of another national controversy, in which each of the Three Estates of the realm were to contend for the maintenance, or the subversion, of those privileges, which had hitherto detached them so widely from each other. For that conflict nothing was wanting but a convenient occasion, and an appropriate theatre.

Such an occasion, and such a theatre were supplied in October, 1614, when, in obedience to the summons of Louis XIII., the States General of France were assembled at Paris. Although, according to the letter of the law, Louis had at that time attained his majority, he was really a boy in his fourteenth year, in tutelage to his mother,

•Marie de Medici. She was the feeble head of a licentious and disaffected court. To purchase the support of the great lords of the realm, she had squandered a large part of the treasure which had been amassed by the providence of Sully. But the sacrifice was ineffectual. Condé, d'Epéron, and the other chiefs of the old religious factions were in arms, at the head of their followers. The protestants were on the eve of a new religious war. The papal court and the Jesuits were propagating ultramontane doctrines, to which the recent assassinations of Henry III. and Henry IV. had given a fearful significance. The people at large, especially in the south, were victims of the most abject poverty and distress; and the popular writers of the age were agitating critical and dangerous questions; as, for example, why the interests of a great nation should all be staked on the life of a single man? and why the welfare of millions should depend on the wisdom of that one man's domestic councillors?

Alarmed by the gathering tempest, the queen-mother at one time sought, in alliances with the House of Austria, a protection against the people she had been called to govern; and, at another time, she summoned their representatives to meet at Paris, to assist her with their counsels.

Florimond de Rapine is the great contemporary historian of the proceedings of the assembly which met in obedience to this royal citation. The general effect of his narrative is to show that, in this last convention of the representatives of the States General under the old monarchy, the three orders of which they were composed broke out into an open and an irreconcilable hostility. Concurring, indeed, in that ancient constitutional jealousy of the Crown by which their predecessors had been animated, they agreed in deprecating the dissolution of the States before their complaints for the redress of grievances should have actually ripened into royal enact-

ments ; and they were, therefore, unanimous in resolving to commence their labours, by preferring to the king a joint petition, demanding redress of some few of the more prominent of the evils under which their constituents were labouring. By this method it was assumed that they would deprive the court of any plausible pretext for evading the required concessions, by postponing their answer until after the close of the session.

But though unanimous in concerting this plan of operations, they could not agree in carrying it into effect. The clergy proposed that, in the select list of grievances, the foremost place should be assigned to the wrong done to the Church by the long neglect of the Crown to receive the decrees of the Council of Trent as binding on all persons within the realm of France. To that proposal the nobles gave a slow and reluctant adhesion ; the Tiers Etat, a peremptory and contemptuous refusal. They denied the necessity for any such request to the Crown ; — inquired why the clergy did not themselves inculcate reverence for the Tridentine decrees by their own voluntary obedience to them ; why, for example, such of them as had two or more benefices did not conform to the laws of the synod, by resigning them in favour of other pastors who had none.

After setting aside the scheme of the clergy by this and similar sarcasms, the Tiers Etat proceeded to exhibit their own project. They advised that the joint preliminary petition of the three orders should embrace four grievances. These were, first, the undue magnitude of the pension list ; secondly, the excessive pressure of the tailles ; thirdly, the venality of public offices ; and, fourthly, the annual tax, called the paulette, which was paid to the Crown as the price of the hereditary tenure of them. In the last two suggestions the clergy and the noblesse willingly acquiesced, because the advantage derived from the traffic in public employments, and from

the heritable title to them, was enjoyed exclusively by the roturiers. But they refused to solicit either a reduction of the tailles, from which they were themselves exempt, or a decrease of the pensions of which their own orders were the sole recipients.

Unable, as the Three Estates thus were, to concur in the demands to be made for the relief of their constituents, they were still more decidedly at variance as to the demands to be made for the security of the king himself. Alarmed by the recent excommunications and murders of their last two sovereigns, and animated by the habitual propensity of Frenchmen to a verbal defiance of the Papal court, the Tiers Etat resolved to place at the head of their cahier a request, that it might be enacted as a fundamental and inviolable law of the kingdom, "that no power on earth, whether spiritual or temporal, hath any right either to deprive the realm of France of the sacred persons of her kings, or for any cause or on any ground whatever to dispense or absolve their subjects from the fealty or obedience due to them;" and they desired to add the request, that the contrary opinion might be declared "to be impious and detestable, opposed to truth and to the constitution of the state of France, which is immediately dependent on God alone." Against this suggestion the clergy entered a vehement protest. They declared it to be nothing less than an attempt to establish the English oath of abjuration. They announced their readiness to suffer martyrdom, rather than participate in such an outrage on the spiritual authority of the pope. The kings of the earth, they said, were bound to lick the dust from the feet of the Church, submitting themselves to her authority in the person of the sovereign pontiff. They maintained that such an enactment would encroach on the lawful authority of the spiritual power, to which alone it belonged to determine how far the pope was entitled to depose kings, and to absolve their subjects from their oaths

of allegiance; and, adopting the celebrated Jesuitical doctrine of probability, they declared that, in the absence of such a decision, the affirmative and the negative of that question were equally probable, and might alike be holden and acted upon with a good conscience.

Such was the violence of the contention, that the clergy had threatened to retire from the States General, and to place the kingdom under an interdict; when, to terminate the dispute, the court evoked the article in debate; that is, they assumed to the king himself the exclusive consideration of it, and directed that the passage of the cahier referring to it should be expunged.

The speeches to which these and similar controversies between the three orders gave occasion, afford a yet clearer illustration of the antipathies by which the different classes of society were at this time alienated from each other. Montaigne, one of the orators of the Tiers Etat (who has been strangely confounded, by more than one eminent French writer, with his illustrious namesake), denounced the baseness of the noble pensioners of his age, with a vehemence into which all the wrongs which were ever done on the face of the earth could never have betrayed the philosophical essayist. "Is he who serves his king in hope of a pension (demanded the speaker) a good and faithful subject? Alas for the unworthy Frenchmen, French in nothing but the name, who serve your king as mercenaries! If your hearts were touched with the true spirit of obedience, you would serve him not for money, but because he reigns over you by the law of France, and by the law of nature, and by the law of God."

Savaron, another commoner, seems to have excelled in that rhetorical artifice by which the deepest wounds are inflicted in eulogistic phrases, and the deadliest sting is disguised beneath the most affectionate language. In the form of sarcastic apologies, he poured out a series of bitter reproaches upon the noblesse. After depicting the stu-

pidity which had induced them to abandon the judicial office to men of humble birth,—he affects to account for it as a respectable prejudice. After showing that they had abstained from purchasing public offices, because they were incapable of discharging public duties,—he sneeringly applauds the rectitude and generosity of their forbearance. And when he condemned the conduct of the nobles to his own order, he, at the same time, respectfully acknowledged that the nobles were their elder brethren;—anticipating, perhaps, but doubtless rejoicing in, the preposterous violence of their answer, that they would not allow themselves to be addressed as brethren by the sons of cobblers and soap-boilers, who were as much their inferiors as the valet is below his master.

We find Robert Miron, a third of these champions of the Commons, thus apostrophising the king with all the energy of a tribune of the people. “That man’s heart,” he said, “must be surrounded by triple brass, and fenced with a rampart of adamant, who can think of the miseries of your subjects without tears and lamentations. For the support of your kingdom they toil incessantly, regardless of their health and of their lives. They have their sweat and their wretchedness for their pains. Whatever else they gain is consumed by the *tailles*, the *gabelles*, the *aides*, and the other subventions of your majesty. Yet, even when thus stript of everything, they are still required to provide for certain persons, who, abusing your sacred name, harass them by commissions, by inquests, and by other oppressive inventions. It is nothing less than a miracle that they are able to answer so many demands. On the labour of *their* hands depends the maintenance of your majesty, of the ecclesiastics, of the noblesse, and of the commons. What without *their* exertions would be the value of the tithes and great possessions of the Church, of the splendid estates and fiefs of the nobility, or of our

own houses, rents, and inheritances? With their bones scarcely skinned over, your wretched people present themselves before you, beaten down and helpless, with the aspect rather of death itself than of living men, imploring your succour in the name of Him who has appointed you to reign over them; who made you a man, that you might be merciful to other men; and who made you the father of your subjects, that you might be compassionate to these your helpless children. If your majesty shall not take measures for that end, I fear lest despair should teach the sufferers that a soldier is, after all, nothing more than a peasant bearing arms; and lest, when the vine-dresser shall have taken up his arquebus, he should cease to become an anvil only that he may become a hammer."

In the midst of these sarcasms and invectives was raised another, and a far more impressive, voice. It was that of Armand Duplessis de Richelieu, then in his thirtieth year, the descendant of an ancient family in Poitou, who, after having been trained to arms, had been appointed, at an early age, to the bishopric of Luçon. He was distinguished amongst the members of his own order in the States General as one of the ablest and most effective of their speakers. As if to justify that praise, he has preserved in his *Memoirs* the oration which he delivered at the final meeting of the States in the royal presence. It shows how much he was in advance of his age, as to the real objects and right use of rhetoric. With the exception of a few occasional sacrifices to the pedantic taste of the times, it is throughout clear, vigorous, and to the purpose. It depicts, in precise and comprehensive terms, the grievances of the people, but especially of the clergy of France; and dwells with an amusing, but prophetic, emphasis on the benefits which the kingdom would derive, from the admission of the more enlightened prelates into the royal counsels.

On the 23rd of February, 1625, after four months of



eloquent disputations and assiduous labours, the clergy, the nobles, and the Tiers Etat presented to the king their cahiers of grievances. On the following day the Tiers Etat returned to their usual place of meeting, in the hope that some communication would then be made to them of the measures to be taken in pursuance of their demands. But, in that short interval, the place had been the subject of a metamorphosis at which some appear to have wept, though assuredly but few Frenchmen could have refused also to smile at so whimsical a contrast. The president's throne, the secretaries' chairs, the members' benches, and the speakers' tribune, had all given place to painted orchestras, gilded sideboards, embroidered stools, and silken cushions; in short, to the preparations for a ball to be given by the sister of Louis to the cavaliers of his court. The impression produced by this disappointment on Florimond Rapine and his associates is amusingly described by himself. "We began," he says, "to see, as in a mirror, all our errors, and regretted the cowardice and weakness of our past proceedings. Day by day we paced the pavement of the cloister of the Augustines, to learn what was to happen. Everybody was asking news from the court; nobody had anything certain to tell. One man depicted the public calamities; the next criticised the language of the chancellor and his partisans; the third smote on his breast, bemoaning his unprofitable journey; while another was counting up the minutes which must elapse before he might quit his hateful residence at Paris, and forget the expiring liberties of his country in the quiet of his home and the caresses of his family. All were agreed in devising means for obtaining our dismissal from a city, in which we were now wandering idly up and down, with nothing to do, either for the public or in our private affairs." Among the deputies some, however, appear to have been of a sterner mood. One of them indignantly exclaimed, "Are we not the very same men who yesterday

entered the royal presence chamber, to complete the most important transaction which could happen in France? Or can a single night have so totally changed our rank, our station, and our authority?" "Are we not the same men to-day that we were yesterday?" exclaimed the Abbé Sieyès, one hundred and seventy-four years later, in the Tennis Court of Versailles. The phrase which, in the reign of Louis XIII., had served only to turn a period, was sufficient, in the reign of his successor, to expedite a revolution.

We must not, however, judge lightly of the real importance of this convention of the States General of France in the 17th century. Their petitions were productive, though at the distance of fifteen years, of some beneficial enactments; and the principles which they asserted were the salient, though the long dormant, springs of those great changes, which eventually gave a new character to all the political institutions of the kingdom. Thus the adjustment, which the Tiers Etat proposed to establish, of the great controversy of the League, became the basis, and was almost the text, of the declaration framed by Bossuet, and adopted by almost all the bishops of the Gallican Church, in the year 1682. And thus, also, they anticipated four at least of the great political doctrines of France in the age in which we live: the doctrines, that is, of the equality of all men in the eye of the law,—of the subordination of all judicial tribunals to one supreme and superintending judicature,—of the uniformity of the rates of export and import duties in every district of the state,—and of the right of all men freely to engage in every branch of commerce. Though concurring in these demands, the clergy separated their cause from that of the other two orders by the extravagance of their ecclesiastical pretensions; while the noblesse constituted themselves the apologists for all those abuses which were crushed at the first rude shock of the Revolution of 1789. Had the Three Estates been unanimous, they might have averted

that catastrophe; for their united power would have been sufficient to have given a new tendency and character to the whole of the subsequent history of France. But, by their dissensions, they afforded the court of Louis XIII. a specious, if not, indeed, a reasonable, escape from all the reforms which the Tiers Etat had so earnestly demanded. The time was, perhaps, unripe for such innovations, and it was presumptuously concluded that it would *never* ripen. So at least judged the Queen-mother and her advisers. But it was with a much further sighted prescience that Richelieu had contemplated the scene in which he had borne so conspicuous a part. He had observed how great was the rising power of the Commons, how enlightened their policy, how formidable their moral influence, and, at the same time, how ill regulated their passions: he had studied the means of rendering those passions subservient to his schemes of absolute dominion; nor was the period remote in which he was to reduce to practice the result of those profound meditations. That period, however, had not as yet come.

When deprived of the guidance of the States General, the mass of society turned for leaders to the Parliament of Paris. It was one of the favourite maxims of that company, that they were *les Etats Généraux au petit pied*; that is, that they were the depositaries of their powers when the States themselves were not in session. Though it was impossible to discover any law, it was easy enough to find authoritative suffrages in support of this doctrine; for the Parliament had a strong hold on the confidence and affections of society. Although many of the members of it were nobles, the councillors or judicial members were invariably commoners, though, indeed, commoners of the highest consideration. Their learning, their integrity, and their public spirit merited, and were rewarded by, universal esteem. A large proportion of them had the advantage of great wealth, and the habitual demeanour of

them all was that of men justly confident in their own position and authority. In them the people admired and revered the fearless antagonists of the nobles, of the favourites, and of the court. They passed for the guardians of the liberties of the Gallican Church, and for defenders of national, as opposed to foreign interests. Moreover they formed a compact and united phalanx. They were, or seemed to be, the one stable bulwark in the state, beneath which the weak might hope to find shelter from oppression, and under the shelter of which the public liberties could be securely nourished.

And yet, as often as the Parliament advanced beyond the limits of their appropriate judicial functions, they were in reality feeble, if not impotent. In their conflicts with the Crown and its officers, they had no effective constitutional weapon. They could, indeed, refuse to register a royal edict. They could pronounce eloquent remonstrances. They could retire, with the most imposing dignity, into prison or to exile. But then their quiver was exhausted. Their political story is thus the record of enterprises commenced with all imaginable pomp, and ended with all imaginable meanness; of prodigies of moral courage dwindling away into pitiful intrigues; of patriotic designs terminating in civil wars; and of loyal enterprises resulting in traitorous alliances with the foreign enemies of their kings.

Since the dissolution of the States General of 1614, a month had not passed before the Parliament had embarked in one of these desperate undertakings. They had convened all the nobles and public officers who were members, though not councillors, of their body, to deliberate on certain proposals to be made for the service of the king, for the good of the state, and for the solace of the people. The arrêt was a manifest usurpation, and was promptly and indignantly annulled by an order of the king in council. They met to remonstrate against this mandate, and were

again commanded to desist. They then actually prepared, and, in imitation of the States General, they delivered to Louis, a cahier of public grievances, and were answered by a peremptory interdict against their further interference in any affairs of state. The perplexed magistrates, at the end of their resources, now betook themselves to the debate of points of law, and to the investigation of theories of government. To cut the knot by which the lawyers had been baffled, their noble and military colleagues drew their swords. In defence, as they pretended, of their company, the Prince of Condé, and the Dukes of Bouillon, Mayenne, and Longueville, plunged their country into a civil war; a war as ignominious in its close, as it had been unjustifiable in its commencement.

Seduced by a donation from the court of 6,000,000 livres, those aristocratic commanders abandoned the field almost as soon as they had entered it, leaving to the councillors of the Parliament the responsibility, the ridicule, and the reproach of this extravagant rebellion.

It was no light responsibility: for, in the wanton levity of their hearts, the Parliamentarians had once more kindled the flames, not of civil war only, but of a new war of religion. Condé, indeed, was a bigoted Catholic, but such was still the attachment of the Huguenots for the name he bore, that many of them joined the standard which, as his manifesto assured them, he had raised to prevent the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and to rescue themselves from massacre. His perfidious and mercenary abandonment of their cause left them the helpless victims of the vengeance which they had but too justly provoked. A new persecution fell with terrible weight on the Protestant inhabitants of Béarn, and those outrages yielded in their turn the ordinary and natural results of a vindictive reaction. The deputies of the Calvinistic churches, at a synod or diet holden at La Rochelle, resolved to divide the whole kingdom into eight circles, over each of which a

Protestant commander was to preside, though all of those commanders were to be placed under the orders of the Duc de Bouillon, as the military head of the whole confederacy. By these chiefs, armies were to be raised, officers appointed, and taxes levied; but the power of making peace was specially reserved by the assembly to themselves.

The pretext for this traitorous conspiracy (for it was nothing else) was supplied by those provisions of the Edict of Nantes, which seemed to recognise in the Protestants the right of defending their privileges with arms, and of deliberating, in general assemblies, on all the interests of their churches. Such a construction of the edict was, however, sufficiently refuted by the absurdity of the consequences it involved. Henry IV. could not have designed, as assuredly he was not entitled, to authorise the establishment, within the realm of France, of an independent religious and military republic, protected by assemblies, troops, revenues, and foreign alliances of its own. No government could rationally admit, or safely disregard, a pretension at once so extravagant and so formidable. How formidable, may be inferred from the fact, that although the Dukes of Rohan and Soubise were the only two of the eight elected commanders who accepted that perilous charge, and although Saintonge, Guienne, Quercy, and Languedoc were the only provinces of France in which the confederates of La Rochelle found any support, yet, even with their resources thus unexpectedly reduced, they continued, during sixteen months, to maintain hostilities on equal terms with the royal armies, and at length obtained a pacification, on conditions so favourable as to show that they had effectually balanced, and held in check, the power of their sovereign.

It was immediately after this period that Richelieu first obtained admission to the council of state. He might seem to have been born to supply the deficiencies of the king, and to impart to his dormant virtues the life and

energy of which they stood in need. For Louis was a man of large and just capacity. His ideas of the duties of his station were princely and magnanimous. He lived in profound submission to the law of his conscience, in the fear of God, and in veneration for all men in whom he saw, or thought he saw, any image, however faint, of the Divine beneficence and power. But he was of a feeble, indolent, and melancholy spirit. He was habitually wrapt in reveries, sometimes splendid, though more often gloomy; but he was always incapable of prompt or decisive action. Though a king, he never was, and never could have been, a free man. It was among the necessities of his existence to live under the government of a master. After selecting and rejecting many such, he at length submitted himself to the dominion of Richelieu, and thenceforward endured that bondage to the last. He endured it certainly, neither from attachment nor from fear, but because, as often as he struggled to regain his liberty, his efforts were baffled by his admiration of the genius of his great minister, and by his persuasion that no other man could so effectually promote the welfare of his state and people.

Richelieu, on the other hand, was one of the rulers of mankind in virtue of an inherent and indefeasible birth-right. His title to command rested on that sublime force of will, and decision of character, by which, in an age of great men, he was raised above them all. It is a gift which supposes and requires in him on whom it is conferred, convictions too firm to be shaken by the discovery of any unperceived or unheeded truths. It is, therefore, a gift, which, when bestowed on the governors of nations, also presupposes in them the patience to investigate, the capacity to comprehend, and the genius to combine, all those views of the national interest, under the guidance of which their inflexible policy is to be conducted to its destined consummation. For the stoutest hearted of men,

if acting in ignorance, or under the impulse of haste or of error, must often pause, often hesitate, and not seldom recede. Richelieu was exposed to no such danger. He moved onwards to his predetermined ends with that unfaltering step which attests, not merely a stern immutability of purpose, but a comprehensive survey of the path to be trodden, and a profound acquaintance with all its difficulties and all its resources. It was a path from which he could be turned aside neither by his bad nor by his good genius; neither by fear, lassitude, interest, or pleasure; nor by justice, pity, humanity, or conscience.

The idolatrous homage of mere mental power, without reference to the motives by which it is governed, or to the ends to which it is addressed, — that blind hero-worship, which would place Wallenstein and Gustavus Adolphus on the same level, and extol with equal warmth the triumphs of Cromwell and of Washington, though it be a modern fashion, has certainly not the charm of novelty. On the contrary it might, in the language of the Puritans, be described as one of the “old follies of the old Adam;” and, to the influence of that folly, the reputation of Richelieu is not a little indebted.

In *his* estimate, the absolute dominion of the French Crown and the grandeur of France were convertible terms. They seemed to him but as two different aspects of the great consummation to which every hour of his political life was devoted. In approaching that ultimate goal, there were to be surmounted many obstacles which he distinctly perceived, and of which he has given a very clear summary in his *Testament Politique*. “When it pleased your majesty,” he says, “to give me not only a place in your council, but a great share in the conduct of your affairs, the Huguenots divided the state with you. The great lords were acting not as your subjects, but as independent chieftains. The governors of your provinces were conducting themselves like so many sovereign



princes. Foreign affairs and alliances were disregarded. The interest of the public was postponed to that of private men. In a word, your authority was, at that time, so torn to shreds, and so unlike what it ought to be, that, in the confusion, it was impossible to recognise the genuine traces of your royal power."

Before his death, Richelieu had triumphed over all these enemies, and had elevated the House of Bourbon upon their ruins. He is, I believe, the only human being who ever conceived and executed, in the spirit of philosophy, the design of erecting a political despotism; not, indeed, a despotism like that of Constantinople or Teheran, but a power which, being restrained by religion, by learning, and by public spirit, was to be exempted from all other restraints; a dynasty which, like a kind of subordinate providence, was to spread wide its arms for the guidance and shelter of the subject multitude; itself the while inhabiting a region too lofty to be ever darkened by the mists of human weakness, or of human corruption.

To devise schemes worthy of the academies of Laputa, and to pursue them with all the relentless perseverance of Cortes or of Clive, has been characteristic of many of the statesmen of France, both in remote and in recent times. Richelieu was but a more successful Mirabeau. He was not so much a minister as a dictator. He was rather the depositary, than the agent, of the royal power. A king in all things but the name, he reigned with that exemption from hereditary and domestic influences, which has so often imparted to the papal monarchs a kind of preter-human energy, and has as often taught the world to deprecate the celibacy of the throne.

Richelieu was the heir of the designs of Henry IV., and the ancestor of those of Louis XIV. But they courted, and were sustained by, the applause and the attachment of their subjects. He passed his life in one unintermitted struggle with each, in turn, of the powerful bodies over whom he ruled. By a long series of well-directed blows,

he crushed for ever the political and military strength of the Huguenots. By his strong hand, the sovereign courts were confined to their judicial duties, and their claims to participate in the government of the state were scattered to the winds. Trampling under foot all rules of judicial procedure and the clearest principles of justice, he brought to the scaffold one after another of the proudest nobles of France, by sentences dictated by himself to extraordinary judges of his own selection; thus teaching the doctrine of social equality, by lessons too impressive to be misinterpreted or forgotten by any later generation. Both the privileges, in exchange for which the greater fiefs had surrendered their independence, and the franchises, for the conquest of which the cities, in earlier times, had successfully contended, were alike swept away by this remorseless innovator. He exiled the mother, oppressed the wife, degraded the brother, banished the confessor, and put to death the kinsmen and favourites of the king, and compelled the king himself to be the instrument of these domestic severities. Though surrounded by enemies and by rivals, his power ended only with his life. Though beset by assassins, he died in the ordinary course of nature. Though he had waded to dominion through slaughter, cruelty, and wrong, he passed to his great account amidst the applause of the people, with the benedictions of the Church; and, as far as any human eye could perceive, in hope, in tranquillity, and in peace.

What, then, is the reason why so tumultuous a career reached at length so serene a close? The reason is, that, amidst all his conflicts, Richelieu wisely and successfully maintained three powerful alliances. He cultivated the attachment of men of letters, the favour of the commons, and the sympathy of all French idolaters of the national glory.

He was a man of extensive, if not of profound, learning, a theologian of some account, and an aspirant for fame as a dramatist, a wit, a poet, and an historian. But

if his claims to admiration as a writer were disputable, none contended his title to applause as a patron of literature and of art. The founder of a despotism in the world of politics, he aspired also to be the founder of a commonwealth in the world of letters. While crushing the national liberties, he founded the French Academy as the sacred shrine of intellectual freedom and independence. Acknowledging no equal in the state, he forbade the acknowledgment, in that literary republic, of any superiority save that of genius. While refusing to bare his head to any earthly potentate, he would permit no eminent author to stand bare-headed in his presence. By these cheap, and not dishonest arts, he gained an inestimable advantage. The honours he conferred on the men of learning of his age they largely repaid, by placing under his control the main-springs of public opinion.

To conciliate the commons of France, Richelieu even ostentatiously divested himself of every prejudice hostile to his popularity. A prince of the Church of Rome, he cherished the independence of the Gallican Church and clergy. The conqueror of the Calvinists, he yet respected the rights of conscience. Of noble birth and ancestry, his demeanour was still that of a tribune of the people. But it was not by demeanour alone that he laboured to win their regard. He affected the more solid praise of large and salutary reforms.

At the distance of fifteen years from the close of the States General of 1614, he had matured the plans by which he proposed not only to give effect to the cahier of the Tiers Etat, but even to advance far beyond the limits within which they had circumscribed their requests. To have accomplished his designs, by the unaided powers of the Crown, would have been to deprive of much of its grace the boon he intended to confer. To have sought the concurrence of the States General in a new assembly, would have been to counteract his great purpose of ele-

vating the Crown above all popular control. He avoided the dilemma by the convention of an assembly of Notables selected by himself. It comprised fifty-five members, amongst whom no duke, nor peer, nor provincial governor had a place. The majority were commoners, but commoners of high distinction, drawn from the various sovereign courts of the realm. In the States General the initiative of all cahiers, or requests for the redress of grievances, belonged to the three orders. In the assembly of Notables, Richelieu claimed it for himself. In his indications of the general objects with a view to which new laws were requisite, he more than anticipated the hopes of the people. Little is it to be wondered that their enthusiasm was fired by projects of which the following are an example.

The king was to be requested to remit all taxes affecting those of his subjects who were either engaged in productive labour, or suffering under urgent want, — to throw open promotion in the army to every class of society, — to maintain an exact balance between the receipt and the expenditure of the treasury, — to increase the navy for the protection of commerce, — to establish new commercial companies, — to form new canals, — to rescue the husbandman from the rapacity of the troops by a stricter discipline, and a punctual payment of their wages, — and to dismantle every fortress and castle which was not actually required for the defence of the realm.

A more captivating programme of reforms has not been produced in our own days, before the National Assembly of Paris, or the commercial hall of Manchester. It was welcomed with delight, and then transferred to commissioners charged with the duty of translating these abstract doctrines into circumstantial edicts. But, in the case of the last of his proposals, Richelieu saw fit to dispense with any such formality. He summoned the people

at once to execute the sentence passed against the fortresses and castles of their lords. Never was a royal injunction more zealously obeyed. In every province and city of France myriads of plebeian hands were joyfully raised to demolish the strongholds which they had so long dreaded, and so cordially abhorred. The work of destruction was done with order and with calmness. Not one stone was left upon another which could again serve to shelter the oppressions of the lords. Not one stone was cast down which might serve as a monument of the ancient faith or institutions of their country.

The completion of this labour of love was promptly rewarded by the promulgation of the royal edict designed to give effect to the cahiers of the Notables. It comprised four hundred and sixty-one articles, ranging over every branch of the internal polity of the realm:—civil law and penal law—ecclesiastical affairs and education—justice and finance—commerce and canals—the army and the navy. But the art of codification may flourish without any advancement being made in the still greater art of legislation. The code of Richelieu, like many other French codes before his time and since, was the Promethean statue without the Promethean fire. It wanted nothing except a living principle. Its great author had also been the author of an irresistible despotism. The elder of his offspring devoured the younger. Having created a power superior to all law, it mattered little or nothing what laws he afterwards called into existence.

Thirdly. The strength of Richelieu consisted in his alliance with the idolaters of the national glory. By wars, successful if not brilliant, by negotiations judiciously conducted, by many treacheries, and by a policy philanthropic in pretence but profoundly selfish in reality, he transferred to the House of Bourbon the ancient influence of the House of Austria. The once formidable armies of Spain were finally crushed at Rocroi, at Nordlingen, and

at Lens; and the Peace of Westphalia established amongst the powers of Europe a balance, of which the adjustment and the superintendence thenceforward belonged to France. It is true, indeed, that several years had elapsed from the death of Richelieu before those victories were won, and that peace was made. Yet, as they were the immediate fruits of his policy, and the direct results of the impulse given by him, they were not unjustly regarded as triumphs won under his auspices, and as trophies to his fame.

With what enthusiasm the Frenchmen of his own age regarded the great author of their national aggrandisement, may, perhaps, be best inferred from the following passage which occurs in a prefatory discourse, which, so lately as the year 1850, was prefixed, by so considerable a person as M. Augustin Thierry, to one of those volumes of the national records, for the publication of which the world is indebted to M. Guizot; — a discourse to which I gladly acknowledge my own obligations for a more profound and comprehensive survey than I have elsewhere seen of those passages of the history of France to which our attention has been directed on the present occasion. “The exterior policy of Richelieu,” observes M. Thierry, “has the singular merit that, after the lapse of two centuries, it is still as living and as national as at the day of its birth. Since the fall of the Roman empire that policy has never ceased, if I may use such an expression, to form a part of the national conscience. It is the policy which the nation has demanded with importunity, and with menaces, of each of the two dynasties which it has so lately crushed. It is the policy which the nation demands now, when restored to her full liberty of action. It consists in the maintenance of independent nationalities, in the enfranchisement of oppressed nationalities, and in respect for the bonds resulting from the community of language and of race. When speaking on the question of the right of France

to an aggrandisement which would give her a definite frontier,—a question often proposed during three centuries, and still pending,—Henry IV. said, ‘I desire that all who speak Spanish should belong to Spain, and all who speak German to Germany, but that all who speak French should be mine.’ On the same subject Richelieu said, ‘the object of my administration has been to re-establish the natural limits of Gaul, to identify Gaul and France, and to render the limits of the new Gaul coincident with those of the old.’ From these principles combined together, and moderating each other, will result, in the ripeness of the time, the ultimate limitation of the soil of France, of that soil to which we have a title legitimate and perpetual—a title resting on the double foundation of history and of nature.”

The hopes thus frankly, and perhaps incautiously, avowed a few months ago by one of the greatest of the living historians of France, though originally excited by Richelieu, first received a definite form and a tangible substance in the reign of Louis XIV. The prejudices of M. Thierry and of his fellow-countrymen may dispose them greatly to overrate the real grandeur of that era. Our own prejudices are not less prone to undervalue it. In unadorned truth, however, it is the most splendid, if not the only splendid, period of the ancient French monarchy. It gave birth to more remarkable events, and to more illustrious personages, than any other. It was then that the territory of France received its principal enlargement. It was then that the administration of her government was first reduced to any well-ascertained system, or conducted on any self-consistent principles. It was the age of her greatest mechanical and manufacturing inventions. The codes of French jurisprudence were then first reduced into method, and France then possessed her greatest generals and her most illustrious writers.

But there is a dark reverse to this brilliant picture. It was in the reign of Louis XIV., also, that France was afflicted by calamities fearfully contrasting with her recent glories in arms, in arts, and in literature. After eloquence, and poetry, and sculpture, and painting had exhausted their powers in celebrating the triumphs and the felicities of le Grand Monarque, history had to describe the evening of that bright day overcast by famines, by persecutions, by bankruptcy, by defeats, by invasions, and by the domestic sorrows which shed so deep a gloom over the later years of the once idolised king. But that passage of the annals of France is especially important, because it affords the most complete exhibition which we possess, of the real character of her absolute monarchy. To that subject I, therefore, propose to devote my next three lectures, considering the reign of Louis, first, in his minority, that is, during the wars of the Fronde and the administration of Mazarin; secondly, in his early manhood, that is, during the administration of Colbert and Louvois; and, thirdly, in his declining years, that is, during the conduct of the government by Louis himself in person. That division will bring under review each in turn of the most momentous constitutional questions of that eventful period.



## LECTURE XXIII.

ON THE ABSOLUTE MONARCHY DURING THE MINORITY  
OF LOUIS XIV.

Soon after the surrender of Bourdeaux to the arms of Mazarin, three of his defeated antagonists accompanied him, in his carriage, to a short distance from the city. As they rolled along, the Cardinal gaily exclaimed, "Who would have thought, a week ago, that, by this time of day, we four should be sitting together so much at our ease?"—"Tout arrive en France," was the characteristic answer of La Rochefoucauld, one of his fellow-travellers. There is no better example, even in his own maxims, of the art of compressing much truth into a narrow compass, than is afforded by this epitome of the civil wars in which he was then engaged. For never, before or since, did so many marvellous personages crowd into the space of four years so many marvellous doings, to be afterwards recorded by such a series of marvellous writers. The Fronde is a protracted drama, where, in defiance of all French theatrical laws, tragedy, comedy, and buffoonery struggle for the pre-eminence, but where, nevertheless, a French critic might be pleased to recognise some approach to two

of the three indispensable unities of his national stage — those, namely, of action and of place.

On the 14th May, 1643, Louis XIII. closed his melancholy life, and transmitted his crown to the fourteenth Louis, then a child in his fifth year. In the first week of the new reign, the armies of France under Condé won the splendid victory of Rocroi. With what rapture it was hailed by the people at large, may perhaps be inferred from the exulting eloquence in which, at the distance of fifty years, Bossuet revived, in one of his funeral orations, the impressions which that great triumph had produced upon his own boyish mind, when a student at the University of Paris. All was festivity and joy. The ruthless dominion of the austere Richelieu had given place to the indulgent rule of the affable Mazarin. The Queen-mother had thrown open, to the Parisian world, those princely halls, which her gloomy husband had devoted to monastic austerities. Prisoners discharged from captivity, exiles returning from foreign lands, thronged her brilliant court to participate in the hilarities of the new era, and to solicit compensation for their former sufferings. Such was the universal good humour, that, according to a courtly hyperbole of those joyous days, the whole French language was reduced to the five little words, "*la Reine est si bonne.*"

Less obsequious observers, however, could perceive, beneath this flowery surface, the widely scattered seeds of approaching disaster. During the administration of Richelieu, many had really suffered in the cause of Anne of Austria; and many more now ascribed to their zeal in her service the enmity which they had either endured, or apprehended, from the remorseless cardinal. To reject the demands of such ancient partisans, would be to insure their vindictive resentment. To accede to those demands, would be to provoke the hostility of all the other candidates for honours or advancement. It was an inextricable

dilemma. A few weeks were sufficient to crowd the chambers of the Louvre with dissatisfied courtiers, bemoaning the disappointment of their long cherished hopes, celebrating their past merits, and denouncing the heartless ingratitude of princes. Their complaints and pretensions amused the laughter-loving people of Paris, and won for them the sobriquet of "*Les Importants*." To themselves, however, such merriment seemed utterly misplaced. So keen, indeed, was their anger, that the leader of their cabal, the Duc de Beaufort, meditated mortal vengeance; and, as a punishment for the intended assassination of Mazarin, was sent to brood over his wrongs, as a prisoner of state, in the dismal towers of Vincennes.

To these embarrassments succeeded financial difficulties. The war was conducted with alternate success and failure, but with an unintermitted waste of the public revenue; and while Guébriant, Turenne, and Condé were maintaining the military renown of France, D'Émery, the superintendant of finance, was struggling with the far severer difficulty of raising her ways and means to the level of her expenditure. The internal history of the first five years of the regency is thenceforward a record of the contest between the Court and the Parliament of Paris; — between the Court, promulgating edicts to replenish the exhausted treasury, and the Parliament, remonstrating in angry addresses against the acceptance of them. In some of those remonstrances, Omer Talon, the advocate general, addressed the Queen-mother in terms from which the orators of the National Convention might have borrowed proofs and illustrations of their favourite doctrines of the rights of man. But Anne of Austria listened to such eloquence in a spirit most unlike that of her descendant, Louis XVI. She seems to have regarded M. Talon in the light of a tragic actor, reciting a declamation from Corneille, and warmly extolled the rhetorical embellishments with which he had adorned it. Nor does the

speaker himself appear to have foreseen the approach of any more genuine tragedy; for, just before his delivery of the last of those patriotic speeches, he recorded, in his still extant journal, his opinion that a great and universal calm had, at length, been firmly established throughout the kingdom. To understand how, and by whom, that calm was broken, it is necessary to recur, however briefly, to the constitution of the sovereign courts, which, at that period, had their seat in the Palais de Justice of Paris.

In ancient France, as I had formerly occasion to explain, the title of *Sovereign* was given to every court of justice, from the judgments of which there could be no appeal to any other tribunal. Four such courts were in practice, if not of right, always stationary in the capital. Of these the Parliament was the most considerable. It was a single company divided into five distinct chambers, called the "Grand' Chambre" — the "Chambre des Enquêtes" — the "Chambre de la Tournelle" — the "Chambre des Requêtes" — and the "Chambre de l'Edit."

First. The Grand' Chambre was composed of a high officer, called the first president; of nine presidents à mortier (so called from their mortar-shaped velvet caps, which were the badge of sovereign justice); and of thirty-seven councillors, of whom twelve were clergymen and twenty-five laymen. These were the stipendiary members of the Grand' Chambre. But seats in it belonged to honorary members also. These were the princes of the blood — the dukes and peers of France — the chancellor or keeper of the great seal — the councillors of state — the archbishop of Paris — and the bailli of Clugny — to whom were added four masters of requests. To the Grand' Chambre belonged what was called "la haute direction" of the whole Parliament, the cognisance of all charges of high treason, and jurisdiction in all cases affecting any peer of France, or any great officer of the Crown, or the University of Paris, or the hospitals of that city.

Secondly. The "Chambre des Enquêtes" was a court of appeal from all subordinate civil tribunals, and from all the courts of "Police correctionnelle." The councillors of this chamber were very numerous, and were usually young men, and amongst them were invariably found the most active political agitators of the Parliament.

Thirdly. The "Chambre de la Tournelle" was the court for adjudicating on all criminal cases brought before the Parliament by way of appeal.

Fourthly. The "Chambre des Requêtes" had, for their peculiar province, the decision of all cases specially reserved to the Parliament by the writ of *committimus*, which I formerly mentioned.

Fifthly. The "Chambre de l'Edit" was so called because it was constituted, under the edict of pacification with the Protestants, to decide the causes in which they were chiefly concerned.

Although each of these five component chambers of the Parliament had thus separate functions, yet, when any royal edict was to be registered, or when any other political question was to be discussed, all the members of each met together as one united body. The exclusive right to convene any such general meetings was claimed by the "Grand' Chambre," but that claim was disputed by the others, and especially by the "Chambre des Enquêtes," who asserted an equal right to summon any such conventions.

The three other sovereign courts of Paris were the "Chambre des Comptes," the Cour des Aides, and the Conseil Privé, or Grand Council.

The "Chambre des Comptes" was originally composed of officers of the Crown, selected from the Feudal or Royal Council. It afterwards received a separate organisation not unlike that of our own Court of Exchequer; and, as we formerly saw, became at once an office for auditing the public accounts of the kingdom, and a court of justice for the decision of cases affecting the public revenue.

A large part of the judicial functions of the "Chambre des Comptes" was, however, afterwards transferred to the Cour des Aides. That court was also composed of officers or councillors of the Crown. The judicial powers of the "Chambre des Comptes" and of the Cour des Aides, though not altogether, were yet to some degree, concurrent; but the Cour des Aides did not at all participate in the administrative powers of the "Chambre des Comptes" as auditors of the public revenue.

Finally. The Conseil Privé, or Conseil des Partics, one of the Chambers of the Conseil d'Etat, was (as I formerly explained) a body exercising many high political functions. It also constituted a court of justice, and was sometimes called the Grand Council. It had cognisance of those cases from which other courts were specially excluded. Such, for example, were cases which, by the evocation of the king, or by some peculiar privilege of the suitors, were exempt from the authority of the ordinary tribunals. The Conseil Privé, or Grand Council, had also, like the modern Cour de Cassation, the power to annul the judgments of other courts, when such judgments were self-contradictory, or when they encroached on the legislative or other prerogatives of the Crown.

The councillors or stipendiary judges of each of these four sovereign courts, held their offices for life. But, in virtue of the law called the Paulette, to which I adverted on a former occasion, they also held them as an inheritance transmissible to their descendants. The Paulette, as I then stated, was a royal ordinance, which imposed an annual tax on the stipend of every judge. It was usually passed for a term of nine years only. If the judge died during that term, his heir was entitled to succeed to the vacant office. But if the death of the judge happened when the Paulette was not in force, his heir had no such right. Consequently the renewal of the tax was always welcome to the stipendiary councillors of the sovereign

courts; and by refusing, or delaying to renew it, the king could always exercise a powerful influence over them.

In April, 1647, the Paulette had expired, and the Queen-mother proposed the revival of it. But to relieve the necessities of the treasury, she also proposed to increase the annual percentage which it imposed on the stipends of the councillors of the "Chambre des Comptes," of the Cour des Aides, and of the Conseil Privé, or Grand Council. To concert measures of resistance to the contemplated innovation, those councillors held a meeting in the Great Hall of St. Louis; and at their request the Parliament, though not personally and directly interested in the change, joined their assembly. It was an union too formidable to be needlessly encountered by the royal power; and to escape such a conflict, the queen informed them that such was the profound attachment of the king, her son, for the judges of his four sovereign courts, that he would not only withdraw his proposal for an increase in the rate of the annual tax on their stipends, but would even graciously relieve them from that burden altogether.

There is a time and a place for all things, and, among the rest, for irony; but never in the speeches of kings. Exasperated by the threatened loss of the heritable tenure of their offices, and still more offended by the sarcastic terms in which that menace was conveyed, the judges assembled in the hall of St. Louis with increased zeal, and harangued there with yet more indignant eloquence. Four different times the queen interdicted their meetings, and four different times they answered her by renewed resolutions for the continuance of them. She threatened severe punishments, and they replied by remonstrances. A direct collision of authority had thus occurred, and it behoved either party to look well to their steps.

Of that necessity Anne of Austria was at length profoundly sensible. She had all the firmness of her race, but

she regarded with reasonable alarm the results of such a controversy, and attempted to propitiate, by conciliatory language, the formidable power to which her menaces had been addressed in vain. But the associated magistrates derived new boldness from the lowered tone and apparent fears of the government. Soaring at once above the humble topic on which they had hitherto been engaged, into the region of general politics, they passed at a step from the question of the Paulette to a review of all the public grievances under which their fellow-subjects were labouring. After having wrought during four successive days in this inexhaustible mine of eloquence, they at length, on the 30th June, 1648, commenced the adoption of a series of resolutions, which, by the 24th July, had amounted in number to twenty-seven, and which may be said to have laid the basis of a constitutional revolution. Amongst other things, they demanded that the offices of intendants in the various provinces should be abolished — that a fourth of the tailles should be revoked — that a chamber of justice should be established for the trial of the officers of finance for their malversations — that various guarantees should be established for securing the privileges and jurisdictions of the sovereign courts — that no subject of the king should be detained in prison during more than twenty-four hours, without being interrogated and transferred to his natural judges — that all imposts levied under ordinances not registered in parliament should be discontinued on pain of death — and that the gross amount of all imposts should be paid immediately into the treasury, without any deduction on account of advances made to the king.

Important as these resolutions were in themselves, they were still more important as the assertion, by the associated magistrates, of the right to originate laws affecting all the general interests of the commonwealth. In fact, a new power in the state had suddenly sprung into existence.



It possessed a strong, and at that time an exclusive, hold on the popular favour. The authority it assumed was defined by no ascertained rules, and was limited by no established precedents or maxims. There were, therefore, no assignable bounds to their possible usurpations. But that was an age in which the minds of men, in every part of Europe, had been rudely awakened to the extent to which the unconstitutional encroachments of popular bodies might be carried. Charles I. was at that time a prisoner in the hands of the English Parliament. Louis XIV. was a boy, unripe for an encounter with any similar antagonists. His court was distracted by hostile factions, and a ceaseless war was daily exhausting the resources of his government. The Queen-mother, therefore, resolved to spare no concessions by which the disaffected magistracy might be conciliated. D'Emery was sacrificed to their displeasure ; the renewal of the Paulette on its ancient terms was offered to them ; some of the grievances of which they complained were immediately redressed ; and the young king appeared before them in person, to promise his assent to their other demands. In return, he stipulated only for the cessation of their combined meetings, and for their desisting from the further promulgation of arrêts, to which they ascribed the force and authority of law.

But the authors of this hasty revolution were no longer masters of the spirits whom they had summoned to their aid. They had to choose between a hazardous advance, and a still more hazardous retreat. With increasing audacity, therefore, they persevered in defying the royal power, and in requiring from all Frenchmen implicit submission to their own. Advancing from one step to another, they adopted, on the 28th of August, 1648, an arrêt, in direct conflict with a recent proclamation of the king ; and ordered the prosecution of three persons for the offence of presuming to lend him money. At that moment their debates were interrupted by shouts and discharges of cannon, an-

nouncing the great victory of Condé at Lens. During the four following days, religious festivals and public rejoicings suspended their sittings. But in those four days, the Court had arranged their measures for a coup d'état. As the Parliament retired from Nôtre Dame, where they had attended at a solemn thanksgiving for the triumph of the arms of France, they observed that the soldiery still stood to the posts which, in honour of that ceremonial, had been assigned to them in different quarters of the city. Under the protection of that force, one of the presidents of the "Chamber des Enquêtes," and De Broussel, the chief of the parliamentary agitators, were arrested and consigned to different prisons, while three of their colleagues were exiled to remote distances from the capital.

At the tidings of this violence, the Parisian populace were seized with a characteristic paroxysm of fury. As by some magical impulse, they at once fell into ranks, as if they had been so many bands of a well-organised army. They elected commanders, threw up barricades, and stationed garrisons at every vulnerable point of attack or defence. In less than three hours, Paris had become an entrenched camp. In the centre was the Palais de Justice, the stronghold of the Parliament; and, at the extremity, the Palais Royal, the fortress of the queen. No effectual resistance to the enraged, but well-disciplined, multitude was, however, possible. They dictated their own terms. The exiles were recalled, and the prisoners released. Peals of bells from every steeple, acclamations from every mouth, repeated salvos from twenty thousand muskets, greeted their return; and then, at the bidding of the Parliament, the people laid aside their weapons, threw down the barricades, reopened their shops, and resumed the common business of life, as quietly as if nothing had occurred to interrupt the tranquil course of their ordinary existence.

It was, however, a short-lived triumph. The queen,

her son, and Mazarin effected their escape to St. Germain; and there by the mediation of Condé, and of Gaston Duke of Orleans, the uncle of the king, a peace was negotiated. The treaty of St. Germain was regarded by the Court with shame, and by the Parliament with exultation. But when, according to the terms of it, the royal family had resumed their residence at Paris, the four Sovereign Courts entered upon new and angry debates on the final acceptance of that arrangement. Each of them fastened on some different provisions of the treaty, and each demanded numerous and irreconcilable amendments of them. But they had now to deal with a new and a much more formidable antagonist. Condé was a great soldier, but an unskilful and impatient peacemaker. By his advice and aid, the Queen-mother and the king once more retired to St. Germain, and commanded the immediate adjournment of the Parliament from Paris to Montargis. To their remonstrances against that order, they could obtain no answer, except that if their obedience to it should be any longer deferred, an army of twenty-five thousand men would immediately lay siege to the city.

War was thus declared; but never did war assume a less alarming aspect. At the Hôtel de Ville, the headquarters of the parliamentary forces, a joyous troop of plumed and silken nobles, and a still gayer array of high-born ladies, were permitted to usurp, not only the defence of Paris, but the conduct of public affairs. The fascinated multitude welcomed these aristocratic allies with loud applauses, and even the long-robed magistrates themselves were compelled to confess and to bow to their supremacy. Those *grandees* had, however, plunged into rebellion on no principle at all, and from no assignable motives. Some had been seduced into it by mere idleness, — some by conceit, — others by offended self-love, — and not a few by the allurements of wanton paramours; and while Condé

was drawing his veteran troops round the walls, the gallant lords and ladies within them were caballing, intriguing, dancing, and revelling, with an equal contempt of their own reputation, of the common safety, and of those high political interests which had drawn their plebeian associates into this hazardous contest with their king.

The catastrophe was worthy of such beginnings. With an undissembled contempt both for his learned and for his fashionable adversaries, the conqueror of Rocroi scarcely condescended to put forth his military skill or resources against them. Nor was it necessary; for at the first keen blast of real war, the belligerent propensities both of the Palais de Justice and of the Hôtel de Ville drooped and faded away. An onslaught by Condé, on one of their outposts at Charenton, was followed, within a month, first, by an offer to treat for peace, and then by the actual acceptance of the treaty of Ruel. It was, however, neither a dastardly nor an unwise concession. Gallant as were the spirits of many of the insurgent magistrates, their position was one from which the bravest and the wisest might have rejoiced to retire. The post which brought the tidings of the attack on Charenton, brought also the intelligence of the execution of Charles I.; and the melancholy issue of the revolt of the Parliament in England sounded as a dismal omen in the ears of the Parliament of Paris. Besieged as they then were by the greatest warrior of the age, they had been superseded in the defence of the city, at the bidding of the fickle multitude, by a troop of holiday courtiers. Entertaining no ultimate views but such as the most loyal Frenchman might cherish and avow, they were shocked to learn that their lordly associates were far advanced in a treaty for introducing into the land as their allies, the generals and the troops of the King of Spain, who was at that time engaged in an open war with their lawful sovereign; and,

to complete their distress, they were nearly at the same moment informed, that the Queen-mother had just issued letters patent for the convocation of the States General, in whose presence their own usurped authority must fade away, and their own persons shrink into insignificance and disesteem.

The treaty of Ruel was, therefore, not so much a choice as a necessity. It was, however, a great epoch. It was the close of the constitutional, and the commencement of the romantic, history of the Fronde; and such of the occurrences of that war as lie beyond it are, therefore, not within the limits of the inquiry which I have, at present, proposed to myself. Yet I am unwilling to pass over so curious a passage in the annals of France, as that which is variously called, either the second Fronde, or the War of Princes, without, at least, indicating what are the best sources from which authentic information respecting it may be derived.

The whole contest, whether constitutional or military, has recently been narrated by M. de St. Aulaire and by M. Bazin, in works entitled to no mean rank amongst those in which modern historians have emulated the skill, and surpassed the wisdom, of the great historical artists of antiquity. Of such compendious and philosophical abridgments of the records of past ages, many have earned high admiration, and are justly entitled to it. The great authors of that class have given the most exquisite examples of the power of selecting, grouping, and harmonising events. They have drawn many graphic portraits of human character; and they have supplied us with many luminous statements, and profound solutions of the social and political problems of former times, and with many an analysis of remote occurrences, around which, as a nucleus, the student may accumulate whatever additional knowledge his own researches may bring to the more complete illustration of them. Some of you may perhaps, however, remember how, in one of his graceful flights over

the surface of things, Charles Lamb had the courage to place all such histories in *his* Index expurgatorius of "books impossible to be read;" and although the papal decrees of that most elegant of triflers may not command our absolute submission, yet the more any man descends below the surface over which he fluttered, the more, I think, will he so far agree with him, as to place such books amongst those with which it is "impossible to be satisfied." For indisputable as may be the duty, and great as may be the pleasure, of studying Guicciardini and Davila, Voltaire and Sismondi, Hume and Gibbon, who ever yet closed them without some distaste for such learned epitomes, and for the makers of them? In the dusty fields of ancient chronicles, and even in the flower-beds of some historical romances, may be gathered a more vivid, and perhaps a more just conception of the ages which have passed away, than can be gleaned from any of those scientific and eloquent narratives. The student of the elaborate histories of the Fronde will therefore, in my judgment, do well to cultivate the acquaintance of the great memoir writers among the Frondeurs. Such, however, is their number, that I can, at present, pause to notice a few only of the most considerable.

Foremost in importance, in variety, and in genius, and therefore foremost in fame, are the Memoirs of John Francis Paul de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris and Cardinal de Retz. It might pass for a species of impiety to say, of so eminent an ecclesiastic, that he was a debauchee, a liar, and a knave, if the Cardinal himself had not taken the utmost pains to demonstrate that such were the habits, and such even the boast, of his life. He laid suicidal hands on his own character with an obliquity of moral vision unrivalled, perhaps, except by Jean Jacques Rousseau; and yet, in a letter of Rousseau himself, may be read the following estimate of the merits of his fellow suicide. "I have," he says, "read the Memoirs of

De Retz from end to end. It is a Salmagundy of all things good and bad. The first volume abounds with touches of great beauty, and with many weighty reflections *à propos* to trifles. The other volumes are little better than so much verbiage *à propos* to things of great importance. But what amazes me is, to see a man of rank and of mature age—a priest, an archbishop, and a cardinal—exhibiting himself as a duellist, as living in concubinage, and, worst of all, as a deliberate hypocrite, secluding himself in a religious retirement that he may appear as an honest man in the eyes of the world, and as a rogue in the sight of his Maker.”

Hard words these, but scarcely more hard than true! Nor is the explanation of this strange moral phenomenon either doubtful or recondite. Excepting only his severe and eloquent censor, De Retz was the most eminent and zealous of all the high-priests who have at different times devoted themselves to the worship of Vanity. At her shrine he was prompt to immolate everything—his friends, his country, his religion, and even his reputation for decorum, integrity, and truth. To satiate his thirst for applause on any terms, he became the great teacher and example, to his own and to future ages, of sedition reduced into a science. With all the sententious gravity of a philosopher, he instructs us how the people may be deceived, and how they may be agitated,—how advantage may be taken of the infirmities of the rulers of mankind,—and how even their virtues may be made the instruments of their destruction. Le Gendre, the terrorist, said well of the Cardinal's Memoirs, that they were a breviary of revolution. He was not, however, wholly exempt from ambition in its more vulgar forms. The first great object of his life was to be gazed at and talked about. The second was to obtain the red hat of a cardinal; and he did obtain it by a series of treacheries and falsehoods which would have been more fitly rewarded by a seat in the

galleys, than by a seat in the Roman conclave. And yet, strange and contradictory as it may at first sound, De Retz is a writer from whom much valuable and even trustworthy information is to be obtained. Although no credit be due to one word he says with a view of magnifying his own importance, and although he suppresses all facts hostile to his claims to be the projector of every cabal, the chief agent in every intrigue, and the most daring adventurer in every enterprise, yet his self-portraiture, and his delineations of the great actors who trod the stage with him, bear the most vivid impress of truth in substance, however much exaggerated or discoloured in the details. So graphic and self-consistent are his innumerable portraits, and so carefully are they wrought out in all their minutest features, that the most exalted genius could never have produced them if they had not been close copies of living originals. With all his faults, he places his reader in the very centre of that strange society, and throws a clear light on the character of every member of it, and on the nature of all the transactions in which they were engaged. The book is, besides, one of the best, as it is one of the earliest, examples of the force, the freedom, and the finesse of the French language. It has all the ease and vivacity of a sustained conversation, or rather of a story told by the most animated of conversers to a group of admiring associates. Never, indeed, was genius more perverted, but, even in its perversion, it is genius still.

Inferior in interest only to those of De Retz, La Rochefoucauld also has left to the world his memoirs of the wars of the Fronde, in which he largely participated. After a youth of strange and audacious adventures, he engaged in that controversy, partly, as it would seem, from the mere love of hazard, and partly from a guilty attachment to the Duchesse de Longueville. In her service he sported with his fortune, his reputation, and his life; and devoted his



great literary powers to the single object of making Mazarin ridiculous. But, at the mature age of forty-two, he at length retired from these turbulent scenes to become the centre of the fashionable and the literary society of Paris; and, at the same time, to meditate and to write. He accordingly produced the two books on which his reputation has ever since depended, his *Memoirs* and his *Maxims*. Of his *Memoirs*, Bayle has said that, "he could not believe any lover of antiquity to be so prejudiced as to deny their superiority to those of Cæsar." His *Maxims* may be considered as the philosophical retrospect of the experience acquired in the calature of his youth; and, therefore, as the most impressive of all illustrations of the guilt, the baseness, and the folly of the Fronde. "There is," says Voltaire, "in the whole book, nothing but this solitary thought—that self-love is the single motive of all our actions; but that one thought," he adds, "is presented to us under such a variety of aspects as never to lose its interest." The *Maxims* of La Rochefoucauld are in fact nothing else than the immature and dispersed germs of that philosophy of selfishness which ripened into the "Fable of the Bees," under the fostering care of Mandeville, and which were then crushed for ever by the giant arm of Joseph Butler.

In beautiful contrast with the *Memoirs* of De Retz and of La Rochefoucauld, are those of Madame de Motteville. She was one of the ladies of the household of Anne of Austria, and in that position enjoyed a broader survey of the surface of affairs during the civil wars than any other of the writers who have undertaken to describe them. Her curiosity was as active as her opportunities were ample, and though she wrote as a partisan of the royal cause, she was at least as impartial as any other of the chroniclers of those times. But she excels them all in warmth of heart and singleness of purpose, and in her abundance and variety of interesting anecdotes. She loved

and admired her royal mistress cordially. She had no apparent wish to suppress or to exaggerate the truth; and she is, above all things, free from the selfishness which De Retz avowed as the guide of his life, and La Rochefoucauld as the principle of his philosophy. Madame de Motteville was a true woman; a woman so profoundly interested in the happiness, the troubles, and the reputation of her friends, as never to waste a thought upon her own; and to that generous self-forgetfulness she is really indebted for an authority to which the narrow-souled genius of her great rivals has never been able to elevate either of them.

Yet she was not the most eminent of the women who rose to distinction amongst the contemporary writers of Memoirs of the Fronde. The Duchesse de Montpensier surpassed Madame de Motteville as much in the marvels of her life, as she fell below her in the disinterestedness of her spirit. At the close of the siege of Bordeaux she became the popular heroine of the day. At the head of a troop of courtly damsels she fairly broke down one of the gates of Orleans; and, like another Joan of Arc, marched in triumph into the beleaguered city. Entering the Bastille while the cannon of Turenne were thundering upon its walls, she turned the guns of the fortress against that great captain, and, after repulsing him to St. Denys, rescued the shattered remains of the forces of Condé. And then, braving a Parisian mob in the height of its savage fury, she penetrated to the Hôtel de Ville, and, at the imminent hazard of her own life, saved the magistrates, the ecclesiastics, and the citizens there from the assassins by whom they were surrounded. And yet, if you read the Memoirs of this Penthiſeſlea, you will find that, during the wars of the Fronde, and for many a year before and after, the real question depending in the wide realm of France was not, whether the Parliament or the Queen-mother, whether

Condé or Turenne, whether the French or the Spanish arms should prevail, but how a husband should be found worthy of the hand of Mademoiselle la Duchesse de Montpensier ; — a question to which an ungrateful generation was never able to return any satisfactory answer.

It was, indeed, an age in which both the heroes and the heroines of French history exhibited themselves to the wondering world in characters of the most fantastic extravagance. There were, for example, to be seen, the First President and Chancellor Matthieu Molé, who after long years of humble subserviency to the despotic Richelieu, was now rising to the most sublime heights of moral courage and of patriotic self-devotion ; — and Gaston, Duke of Orleans, thrust by his rank into the foremost place of responsibility and honour, but invariably becoming sick, and taking to his bed at the near approach of danger ; at once the only great speaker, and the only real coward, of the House of Bourbon ; — and Turenne, all grave, decorous, and dutiful as he was, engaging in a traitorous league with Spain against his king, for love of the unhappy Duchesse de Longueville ; — and the great Condé, the Napoleon of his age, year after year leading Spanish armies against his country and his sovereign, from no one conceivable motive except the mere wantonness of vindictive pride, and puerile passion for mischievous activity ; — and the Duke de Beaufort, the illegitimate grandson of Henry IV., but better known as Le Roi des Halles, at one time playing at tennis in the midst of thousands of enthusiastic Poissardes, at another rejecting, from admirers of the same class, a proffered pension of 60,000 livres ; now upsetting a public supper-table, at which a crowd of royal partisans were making merry, and then killing his own brother-in-law in a preposterous duel ; but, under his continually shifting forms of extravagance, remaining still the cherished, the idolised, demagogue of the proletaires of Paris ; — and Broussel, who, at the age of seventy-two, for the first time attracted

to himself, and never afterwards lost, a large share in the same mob-worship ; — and the Duchesse de Longueville, impelled by vanity and ennui into rebellion to her king, treason to her country, and infidelity to her husband, until at length a penitential retirement at Port Royal rescued her from the intoxicating grandeurs, and cares, and pleasures of the world ; — and the Queen-mother, with all the majestic composure and inflexibility of her race, triumphing in the protracted struggle with the enemies of her viceregal throne, though not equally victorious over the frailties of her own heart, and the irascibility of her own temper ; — and Mazarin, twice banished, and twice returning from banishment to France, and there alien, and tortuous, and irresolute, and rapacious as he was, retaining to his latest breath an absolute dominion over the high-spirited people who, during four successive years, had exhausted against him all the quivers of ridicule, invective, and popular indignation ; — and in that strange scene was also conspicuous the young Louis XIV., contemplating, with premature thoughtfulness, the events and the personages amidst which he was growing up to manhood, and from that contemplation imbibing an unmitigable hatred of the institutions, and distrust of the cause, for the advancement of which his kingdom had been so long abandoned to misrule and violence.

Yet, if the wars of the Fronde had terminated with the treaty of Ruel, Louis XIV. might perhaps have drawn from them some deeper and more salutary lessons than these. It was till that era a contest from the character and the conduct of which much practical wisdom might have been gathered.

The Fronde commenced in the spirit of reaction against the absolute dictatorship of Richelieu. But that spirit was at first timid, hesitating, and narrow. Omer Talon, who, as we have seen, had persuaded himself, at the end of the fifth year of the regency, that a great and universal

calm had at length been established, had the integrity to acknowledge that the judicial company of which he was so great an ornament, were provoked into the disturbance of that calm by no more elevated motive than the desire to perpetuate their own offices in their own families. If Anne of Austria had not proposed to abolish the Paulette, the Parliament would not have roused the people of Paris and of France to a rebellion against her. It is, however, a very curious and instructive fact, that the other contemporary historians of the Fronde (De Retz among the number) carefully concealed this important truth. It lay unheeded in the uninviting pages of Talon, and unnoticed by subsequent writers, until very recent students, by referring to the original journals of the Parliament, brought to light this dishonest misquotation of them.

When, however, though from motives thus mercenary, the signal of opposition to the government had been given by the combination against it of the four sovereign courts of Paris, a great, though incongruous, multitude flocked to the standard of revolt. Among them the foremost and the loudest were, of course, those who were enduring palpable wrongs, and smarting beneath real and weighty grievances. These were the Roturiers who were overwhelmed by the intolerable burdens which the protracted war with the House of Austria and the prodigality of the court had laid upon them. Then followed the Noblesse, resenting the overthrow of their ancient predominance; and the citizens of the more considerable towns of France lamenting the subversion of their municipal privileges; and to them were added a multitude of the Tiers Etat, who regretted the loss of the franchises which they and their fathers had enjoyed in the States General and in the election of deputies to serve in that assembly. Not a few also swelled the clamour with imaginations heated by the example so lately given in England, of a successful resistance to the royal authority. Classical students

again were there with bewitching pictures, then first made universally known, of the Athenian and Roman liberties. And there were not wanting statesmen of large views, who, partaking in the progress of thought, by which that age was distinguished, had learnt, and were desirous to teach, that national freedom can never pass out of a name into a reality, until it shall have been guaranteed, not by positive laws merely, but by the unassailable bulwarks of free popular institutions. On every side was, therefore, heard the cry of long suppressed opinions, of newly awakened passions, of secular interests, and of religious convictions. On every side was also invoked the sympathy and the support of the power which had so suddenly, but so resolutely, ventured to confront the throne, and to challenge its absolute supremacy.

The combined courts were thus hurried onwards by an irresistible external influence into a revolt aiming at nothing less than the creation of a new system, and of new principles of government. Nor may we condemn with much severity this attempted usurpation. Richelieu and Mazarin had long governed France with an utter oblivion of the interests of the great body of the French people. The policy common to them both was nothing more than the depression of the House of Austria, in order that the House of Bourbon might be elevated to a power which should be at once supreme abroad, and absolute at home. I will not venture to deny that an enlightened and far-sighted patriotism might, at that time, have pursued these objects with all the energy of the first cardinal, and all the subtlety of the other. But to pursue them, as they did, not as a means, but as an end; not as the means of rendering France prosperous, but as an end in which the rulers of France were to find the grandeur and the glory of their race, was as narrow and as unworthy a consummation as was ever proposed to themselves by men of genius in the government of a mighty

nation. The antagonists of such a system may well expect pardon for some violations of law and even of justice in their efforts for the subversion of it.

Nor was the revolt of the associated magistrates conducted in a feeble or temporising spirit. Their arrêt, or twenty-seven articles, of the 30th June, 1648, amounted to nothing less than the imposition on the Crown of a new charter of government. Their traditional right of remonstrance against royal enactments was alleged by them merely as a shadow and a pretext. The substantial attempt and purpose was to wrest altogether from the king the powers of legislation, of arbitrary taxation, and of arbitrary imprisonments. "Henceforth," so ran the arrêt, "there shall be imposed no taxes except in virtue of edicts and declarations well and duly verified by the sovereign courts with full liberty of suffrage. No subject of the king," it is added, "of whatever quality or condition, may be kept in prison for more than twenty-four hours, without being interrogated according to the ordinances, and transferred to his natural judge." And to secure to themselves the permanent and undivided power of watching over the execution of these resolves, the same arrêt claimed for the sovereign courts a veto on the creation of any new offices which might supersede or emulate their own.

Nor were these the pretensions of wordy and irresolute agitators only. To carry them into effect, the magistrates employed, if they did not promote, the insurrection and the barricades of Paris. They levied troops, appointed generals, raised funds for the conduct of the war, closed the gates of Paris against the king, and negotiated a federative union with all the cities and parliaments of France; nor did they at last lay down their arms until both at St. Germain and at Ruel they had obtained from the king treaties which were, at least, supposed to affirm the entire substance of their insurrectionary demands. And yet, in

fact, not one effective step was made in the wars of the Fronde towards the conquest of constitutional freedom; but, on the contrary, that struggle had the effect of delivering over the kingdom to a power more absolute and irresponsible than had ever before exercised the supreme authority in France. It remains to inquire, What were the causes, and what the explanation, of this disappointment?

First, then, the claims of the associated magistrates were, in strictness of law, a mere usurpation. The four Sovereign Courts of Paris were so many judicial tribunals, but throughout these proceedings they were acting in direct and unequivocal defiance of the law which it was their appropriate duty to enforce. Even if the right of insurrection could be allowed to possess all the sanctity ascribed to it in a later age, it may be supposed that neither Danton, nor Marat himself, would have held the exercise of it sacred except when undertaken by the sovereign people. Those eminent doctors of the science of revolution would probably have repudiated, as unjustifiable, a rebellion planned and conducted by a convention of long robed councillors and presidents à mortier. This incongruity between the appropriate office and the actual employment of the Parisian magistracy threw a constant discredit on their enterprises, and embarrassed all their revolutionary movements.

Not only were the characters of judge and demagogue inherently incompatible, but the councillors of the Parliament laboured under many accidental and personal disqualifications for the conduct of the popular cause. In that as in every other era of French history, the great questions and real difficulties of the government were financial. Richelieu and Mazarin had crushed the whole rural population beneath intolerable imposts. The tailles, the corvées, and the gabelle, had reduced them to the last extremities of want and misery. "Ten years



have now elapsed," said Talon in one of his speeches to Louis XIV., "since the country was absolutely ruined, since the peasants were reduced to sleep on the straw, and all their goods seized in satisfaction of the demands of the treasury. To maintain the luxury of Paris, millions of unoffending people are compelled to live on bread made of bran and oats. They have no protection except in their utter wretchedness. Their souls alone are left to them, and that only because *they* cannot be put up to auction." Never was indignation more eloquent or more just. Yet the very magistrates, in whose name Talon thus spoke, were at that very moment contending, with still greater zeal, and with all the characteristic ingenuity of their profession, against the single equitable tax which the court had ever proposed to establish. It was the octroi, or duty, on provisions brought into Paris and the other great cities; and unmeasured were the invectives with which, in the very midst of the general ruin, the magistrates denounced the injustice of taxing any articles consumed by themselves and their wealthy fellow-citizens. No men could be more ignorant of the great, though melancholy, science of taxation; none more heedless of maintaining even the semblance of disinterestedness; and none, therefore, could be less qualified for the critical office of tribunes of the people.

Though great *municipal* lawyers, the associated magistrates had no proficiency even in the elements of *constitutional* law. On the 24th of October, 1648, the Crown had assented to what may be called their Habeas Corpus Act. On the 18th January, 1650, that is, in less than fifteen months afterwards, that law was flagrantly violated in the persons of the Dukes of Condé, Conti, and Longueville. But when the mother of Condé invoked the recent enactment in favour of her son, the Parliament refused to interfere, alleging that, as no member of the royal house

was amenable to their authority, so neither could any such person be entitled to their protection. They might have alleged, with much greater truth, that the illegal imprisonment of the princes had been secretly sanctioned by themselves. A body thus ignorant or heedless of the elementary truth, that the infringement of the rights of any one member of society, however low or however high, is an injury to all the rest, were but ill-prepared to assume the character of constitutional vindicators of the national liberties.

It is seldom given to individual men to emancipate their minds from bondage to the prejudices of their profession. To professional assemblages that freedom of mind is always unknown and unattainable. Whether they deliberated on the affairs of the commonwealth, or projected political measures, or made war, or entered into treaties, the councillors of the Parliament still wrapped themselves up in their long robes, their legal fictions, and their judicial subtleties. Never were a party in the state so destitute of the power of taking the straight path towards their end, or of using simple words to express their real meaning. For example, the twenty-seven articles of their confederation of the 30th June, 1648; the treaty of St. Germain of September, in the same year; and the treaty of Ruel of March, 1649, form the three pivots of their whole policy. And yet it may well be doubted, whether those great constitutional acts, when read and collated together, would, at this day, convey to any man, uninformed of the history of those times, any definite meaning whatever. For example, the great principle that no prisoner should be confined during twenty-four hours without being interrogated and transferred to his natural judges, though plainly enough stated in the articles of June, 1648, is laid down in the treaty of St. Germain in words selected by the Parliament themselves, which words

are as follows:—"No subject of the king shall hereafter be prosecuted as a criminal, except according to the forms prescribed by the laws and ordinances of the kingdom; and the ordinance of King Louis XI., of October, 1467, shall be observed according to its form and tenor." The lawyers who put together these words might see in them a perfect assent to their corresponding article of June, 1648, and a perfect security for the liberty of the subject. For they were so many hierophants who could not abide a plain-spoken oracle. They preferred a riddle, of which the key was in their own keeping, to any words which had the inconvenience of being universally intelligible. But never yet was a free constitution erected on legal enigmas, or built up by the labours of schoolmen. They who would govern the world must condescend to make use of the world's language. The articles of June, 1648, were plain enough, but they were invalid except in so far as they were ratified by the treaties. Now the treaty of St. Germain said nothing distinctly, and the treaty of Ruel said absolutely nothing at all, respecting the great constitutional questions which those articles had been designed to regulate.

If the pretensions of the Parliament had been really successful, the effect must have been to supersede the authority of the States General, and to break up the kingdom of France into a system of confederated states or governments, as numerous as the sovereign courts or parliaments of the realm. All good Frenchmen deprecated such a result; and the obvious tendency of the measures of the associated magistrates to produce it, greatly impaired their influence with that great but tranquil majority, who will always prefer the permanent welfare of their country, to the triumph of the agitators of the passing day.

There was also in France, at that time, a multitude

of persons who contemplated with alarm the seeming propensity of the French Parliament to imitate the revolutionary example of the Parliament of England. The monarchy of a thousand years was still dear and venerable to most of those who had grown up beneath its shelter, and the supposed enemies of it were regarded by them with alarm and jealousy.

To men accustomed to reflect, the success of the Parliament held out the unwelcome prospect of the introduction of a polity never before heard of in the world, and hardly to be reconciled with the maxims which had been received amongst men as fundamental, on the subject of civil government. It would have been a fusion of all legislative, administrative, and judicial powers; a combination of them all, in the hands of men trained to the study and practice of the law, and forming a kind of hereditary caste, neither selected by the people, nor chosen from among the ancient aristocracy, nor appointed by the Crown. An oligarchy in any form was sufficiently formidable to Frenchmen; but, from an oligarchy of lawyers, they could anticipate nothing which any class of society could regard either with respect, or confidence, or attachment.

The failure of the associated magistracy to accomplish the purposes of their union, is also to be ascribed to the coincidence of the religious with the political division of parties. The Jansenists were Parliamentarians and the Jesuits Royalists. As in England, the Independents and the Episcopalians selected their positions in the state according to their relations to the Church, so in France, the innovators in the ecclesiastical society were also promoters of changes in the commonwealth. And hence it happened, that all the more zealous adherents of sacerdotal power were, in either country, the devoted supporters of the monarchical authority. It was in

no small degree by their aid, that Louis XIV. finally triumphed over both the first and the second Frondeurs, and to these early recollections must be ascribed no small part of the animosity with which, at a later period, he regarded and persecuted the family of Arnauld, and the whole body of their proselytes at Port Royal.

But of all the causes which contributed to neutralise and defeat the efforts of the Fronde to reform the French government, none was so effectual as the alliance into which the Frondeurs were forced with their aristocratic associates, and especially with the family of Condé. That association rapidly destroyed whatever was popular, and generous, and patriotic, in the movement of the Reformers. It rendered the cause and the interests of the people at large subservient to the selfish objects of the Noblesse. They were the too faithful successors and representatives of the old feudal seigneurs. In their hands, the contest wholly changed its character and its purposes. It degenerated from a high principle into a paltry fashion. It was rendered ludicrous by the follies of the courtly ladies, who assumed so conspicuous a share in the direction of it, and hateful by the traitorous alliance into which the Frondeurs were drawn with the foreign enemies and invaders of the kingdom.

And, finally, while France was desolated by this civil war, and was witnessing the decline of the influence of the authors of it, the young king was growing up to manhood, adorned with every kingly grace, and attracting universal admiration by his real, and still more by his supposed, talents and capacity for government. So rapid and complete was the growth of his personal authority, that, before he had completed his twentieth year, the astonished, and now subdued, Parliament saw him appear in his riding-dress among them; to command their acceptance of his edicts, in language and in a tone which Commodus

would not have hazarded with his abject senators. The Fronde had been a reaction against the dictatorship of Richelieu. The reign of Louis XIV. was a still more complete and protracted reaction against the ill-conceived and ill-conducted efforts of the Fronde, to substitute a free for an absolute government in France.

## LECTURE XXIV.

ON THE ABSOLUTE MONARCHY UNDER THE ADMINISTRATION OF COLBERT AND THE FINANCIERS WHO SUCCEEDED HIM.

The administration of Cardinal Mazarin, so far as it has a conspicuous place in the history of the civil government of France, begins and closes with the wars of the Fronde. His name, once so sacred to obloquy, that a Mazarinade and a satirical libel had become convertible terms in the French language, has, since his death, and especially of late years, acquired a perpetually increasing lustre. For in that enthusiastic land there is no offence which will not be pardoned, no applause which will not be given, to any one whose fortune it has been to augment the sum of what is there considered as the national glory. . And although Mazarin long protracted an unnecessary war—though he plunged the state into an abyss of financial difficulties—though, in the midst of the public distress, he accumulated a fortune which would be inadequately represented at the present day by sixteen millions of pounds sterling—though his government was signalised by no one measure of legislative or administrative wisdom—though he was

insincere and timid, and (to the utmost of his faint daring) an oppressor,—yet we cannot deny him the praise of having adopted both the foreign and domestic policy of Richelieu in the true spirit of that unscrupulous dictator. In the wars of the Fronde he played the patrician and the plebeian orders against each other to the common depression of them both; and, by the treaty of the Pyrenees he accomplished that matrimonial alliance, which laid the basis of the long subjection of the monarchy of Spain to the crown of France. At length, on the 9th of March, 1661, he died, leaving in the hands of the youthful Louis XIV. a power more absolute than had ever been enjoyed by any of the successors of Charlemagne, with the not unreasonable prospect of transmitting to his own successors a dominion embracing many of the fairer provinces of the Carolingian empire. Early on the morning of the following day, the king having assembled his council, addressed them in the following words: “I have called you together to say, that though hitherto I have been well satisfied that my government should be conducted by the late cardinal, I intend henceforward to govern in my own person. You will assist me with your advice whenever I shall demand it.” From that hour to his last, Louis XIV. appeared to the world at large, and even to himself, to be the supreme, if not the sole, administrator of the affairs of his kingdom.

He had many royal qualities—a noble presence—manners full of grace and dignity—an elocution at once majestic and seductive—unwearied assiduity in business—a luminous understanding—an instinctive taste for whatever is magnificent in thought or action—and a genuine zeal for the welfare of his people. But for the high office of moulding and conducting the policy of the greatest of the nations of the civilised world, he wanted three indispensable gifts—an education so liberal as to have revealed to him the real interests and resources of his kingdom



—the faculty by which a true statesman, in the silence of all established precedents, originates measures adapted to the innovations, whether progressive or immediate, of his times—and that dominion over passion and appetite which is the one essential condition of all true mental independence. Without such knowledge, such invention, and such self-control, Louis could not really think, and, therefore, could not really act, for himself.

It was consequently inevitable that the office of thinking and of acting for him should be devolved on some minister; and Jean Baptiste Colbert was, ere long, called to the discharge of that arduous duty. Colbert was the son of a merchant of Rheims, and had held the place of intendant in the household of Mazarin. In that employment he had earned the reputation of great skill and diligence in managing the colossal fortune of his master, and in detecting the frauds by which the officers of the royal revenue had enriched themselves at the public expense. His own integrity was universally acknowledged, but the respect commanded by his talents and his virtue was not a willing nor an affectionate tribute. No man, indeed, could be more unpopular; for no man was more severe, morose, and repulsive, even towards those whom he most desired to conciliate. Hostile as such an origin, such pursuits, and such a demeanour might be to his success with others, it would have been impossible for him to have combined together a greater number of powerful recommendations than these to the favour of the young king. Supported by no family connections, or personal attachments, and inured to an obscure and useful drudgery, Colbert seemed of all men the best qualified to render to Louis those humble, but effective, services which, while they would relieve himself from toils incompatible with his kingly state and with his youthful enjoyments, would still leave to him the glory of governing, or of seeming to govern, his vast hereditary possessions. At first, there-

fore, Colbert was privately consulted by his sovereign on some urgent fiscal questions—then employed in prosecuting Fouquet, the superintendant of finance, whose peculations he had brought to light—then admitted to a seat in the royal council—then intrusted with the subordinate function of intendant of finance—then appointed to superintend the works and buildings of the king—then elevated to the post of comptroller-general—and, finally, promoted to the office of secretary of state for the marine and the colonies. During each successive step of this upward progress, the harsh and inflexible minister made many enemies and few friends. Yet he was seldom or never betrayed into the fault of an arrogant self-importance. It was, on the contrary, his habit to depreciate his own power and influence—a habit in which he was not improbably sincere, as he certainly was discreet. He habitually spoke and wrote of himself as a mere subaltern, and as unable either to decide on any measure, or to confer any place or advantage except by the express command of his royal master. Charmed with a servant so upright, painstaking, and unobtrusive, and so destitute of political or domestic alliances, the king could not, or would not, perceive that this lowly dependant was, in reality, becoming his indispensable ruler. Read the instructions of Louis to the Dauphin, and you will conclude that every material act of his government was dictated by himself, and executed by Colbert. Read the authentic documents of that age, and you will be convinced that every measure which Louis dictated to Colbert, had first been suggested by Colbert to Louis. The power of the magnificent Richelieu was, in effect, revived in the unostentatious Colbert, with the difference that, while Louis XIII. had retreated into obscurity, and had been consigned to his confessor and to his oratory, that way might be made for the haughty cardinal, Louis XIV., both in the cabinet, in the field, on the throne, and in every princely pageant,

assumed the imposing majesty of an autocratic sovereign, in whose presence all inferior dignitaries appeared but as so many dependent satellites. The theatrical exhibition was altogether changed; but the plot and characters of the drama were scarcely altered.

Dropping, then, the fiction which ascribes the authorship of all royal acts to the monarch in whose name they are done, I shall consider the reign of Louis XIV., from 1661 to 1672, as really constituting the administration of Jean Baptiste Colbert.

A Protectionist in England and a Colbertiste in France are the same. Yet, in the war against free trade, our neighbours have inscribed on their banners a *nom de guerre* of much greater force and precision than our own. Their Colbert is the very Newton or Linnæus of the science of commercial restriction. The civil government of their country, as administered by him, was a series of crucial experiments on the soundness of the doctrines which that science inculcates. They were tried on the shipping and navigation of France — on her corn trade — on the export of coin — on her foreign commerce — and on her domestic manufactures. Asserting the broad principle that a people labouring under fiscal burdens of unrivalled magnitude, could prosper only by such laws, protecting and prohibitory, as would secure to national products a preference in the home market over the similar products of foreign countries, the great economist of that age brought all his large experience, all his preternatural diligence, and all his unlimited power, to animate and sustain the industry of France by protective legislation. What were the nature and what the results of his experiments?

First, then, with regard to the shipping and navigation of France. As early as the 13th century, the people of Holland and Zealand, an amphibious, hardy, and frugal race, had engrossed the cod and herring fisheries, and

were able to build and to navigate vessels on terms with which no other nation could successfully compete. They became the maritime carriers of Europe. They triumphed over the commercial jealousy of England, and the restrictive laws of Edward IV. They triumphed still more completely over the tyranny and persecution of Spain, and while struggling for existence against the victorious arms of Alva and of Alexander Farnese, they rapidly extended their commerce over the eastern and western possessions of Philip II., until at length the Treaty of Westphalia guaranteed to them Java and the Moluccas, with all their factories in Ceylon and the continent of India, and the exclusive enjoyment of the spice trade. Such was at that time their prosperity, that, about two years before the death of Mazarin, they possessed between 15,000 and 16,000 sea-going vessels, while France could number at the most from 500 to 600.

To destroy this humiliating superiority, a series of edicts were promulgated by Fouquet, the then superintendant of finance, imposing a duty of fifty sous per ton on every foreign ship entering or quitting any French port. During several successive years the Dutch ambassador at Paris exhausted all the resources of diplomatic skill and eloquence in a series of importunate remonstrances against this impost. He might as well have expostulated with the tides against their assaults on the dykes of his native land. Colbert remained inexorable; and, with no substantial change, the discriminating tonnage duty continued in force till long after the end of his administration.

These fiscal hostilities with the Dutch were nearly coincident in point of time with our own Navigation Laws, and were far less stringent. Now Adam Smith has applauded the policy of our forefathers in thus directing the transfer to this country of much of the maritime power of Holland, and has taught that, in order to promote the higher interests of our national strength and safety, the pecuniary

sacrifice involved in the compulsory employment of our own more costly shipping was wisely incurred. If in deference to the authority, or to the reasoning, of Adam Smith, we may conclude Cromwell to have been right, with what consistency can we also conclude that Colbert was wrong?

The two opinions, however apparently in conflict with each other, may, perhaps, be reconciled by observing, first, that the mere pecuniary sacrifice made by England was soon and effectually repaid by the growth of an English commercial navy, far surpassing that of our Dutch rivals; whereas in France, the Dutch, after the restrictive law against their shipping, still retained the greater part of the French carrying trade; so that the French tonnage duty produced little or no other direct result than that of enhancing the freight of all sea-borne goods. Secondly; the inestimable advantage of national safety, which appeared to Adam Smith to apologise for the unthriftiness of our own law, was not in question in France, and, therefore, did not afford a corresponding defence for the mercantile disadvantages to which the French people were subjected by their attempted disuse of the best and cheapest maritime conveyances. And, thirdly, to England, in the time of the Commonwealth, the friendship or the enmity of Holland seemed to promise or to menace but little; whereas to France the amicable relations which she had maintained with the United Provinces for the last preceding eight years, were of inappreciable value. Yet those relations were suspended by the French Tonnage Bill, and not long after gave place altogether to the wars which, during half a century, consigned both France and Holland to a succession of overwhelming sufferings. In a word, by the abandonment of the great mercantile principle, that the cheapest service is the best, Cromwell reaped great gain and little loss, Colbert reaped great loss and little gain.

Secondly. The trade in corn was subjected by Colbert to experiments of yet more serious importance.

Until the reign of Charles V., France had ever enjoyed a perfect freedom of exporting corn to all other countries. After that period, the right was occasionally suspended by royal ordinances. But Francis I. and Henry IV., and even Louis XIV., under the administration of Mazarin, had fully and emphatically re-established it. In the year 1661, however, France was afflicted with a scarcity which might almost be described as a famine, and, after waging an ineffectual war against it by the usual methods of forbidding accumulations of grain in private hands, and fixing a maximum price of corn, Colbert retained in his mind an indelible impression of the horrors of that fatal season. To prevent their recurrence, he obtained, towards the close of every future harvest, official returns of its probable productiveness. If the crops had been plentiful, he authorised the free exportation of corn for a year, or for a few months, or weeks, as he judged best. If the supply did not seem to him abundantly adequate to the wants of the people, he imposed a *temporary* export duty of greater or less amount. If he saw cause to anticipate a deficiency, he forbade the exportation altogether.

No man, therefore, could safely engage in the growth of corn in France for sale in any other country; for, however high the prices in the foreign markets might eventually be, as compared with the prices in the French markets, it depended entirely on the future decision of Colbert whether the owners of it should, or should not, have the power of availing themselves of that advantage. The results of course were; first, that the export of grain from France ceased altogether; secondly, that all the inferior soils were thrown out of cultivation, the superior soils alone being brought under tillage; and, thirdly, that there was a constant risk, and not seldom an actual pro-

duction, of scarcity, and even of famine. Except in extreme exigencies of that kind, corn could never be sold at any considerable profit to the agriculturist. He was, therefore, condemned to habitual poverty, and his inability to purchase manufactured goods, deprived the producers of them of their most important customers. Such, at least, are the consequences which our own economical theories would ascribe to such an interference of the government with the natural course of the corn trade. How far are we able, from any direct evidence, to verify or to disprove those anticipations?

They might be verified from the many still extant reports addressed to Colbert by the intendants of the various provinces of France, and especially by the intendants of Gascony, Poitou, and Dauphiné. But we have a memoir, transmitted by the minister himself to the king in the year 1681, in which the great author of this system thus sums up the result of it:—"The most important fact of all," he says, "and that which demands the greatest reflection, is the excessive misery of the people. It is announced in all the letters which reach us from the provinces, whoever may be the writers of them, whether intendants, receivers general, or even bishops." Seventeen years later, Marshal Vauban, whose public spirit was not inferior to his military science, drew up his celebrated account of the state of France, in which he declared that a tenth part of the whole population were reduced to pauperism; that five other tenth parts of it were so poor as to be unable to contribute anything to the relief of the destitute; that three other tenth parts were grievously straitened in their circumstances, and oppressed by debt; and that, in the only remaining tenth part, there were not ten thousand families in perfectly easy circumstances. That Colbert sincerely desired, and ardently pursued, the welfare of the kingdom which he governed, no one has ever questioned. But it may well be doubted

whether any degree of apathy or negligence was ever so fatal in its results, as was his ceaseless solicitude to interfere in everything, and to manage everything. Happy would it have been for France if her indefatigable minister had learnt, like an eminent statesman of later times, to divide his official business into three equal parts, of which the first was not worth the doing, the second did itself, and the third was quite enough for any man to attempt.

Thirdly. Regarding the trade in gold and silver money, Colbert, adopting the opinions of his age, proclaimed and acted on the maxim, that the wealth of a nation is to be measured, at any given moment, by the quantity of such coin which it may happen to possess. It is, I think, no less a person than Voltaire who extols his wisdom in thus preferring the accumulation of imperishable bullion to the exchange of it for articles which must, sooner or later, *wear out*. The less scientific merchants of his day represented to Colbert that the rigour with which he prevented or punished the exportation of the precious metals was rendering them of less value in France than in other countries; and added that, if the transit of them were unfettered, gold would always be attracted to France from every part of the world in which it bore a lower value. The universal manager of all the affairs of the whole realm had the honesty to record his inability to understand the meaning of this remonstrance; and then, assuming that it had no meaning, he persisted in devoting the whole influence of the government to the hopeful project of causing French produce to be exchanged in all other parts of the world for gold and silver in preference to every other return. Fortunately, the common sense of the merchants was too active for the Laputan science of the statesman. Had it been otherwise, France would have acquired a vast mass of gold and silver, as useless in her coffers as in its native mines, at the expense of



bringing to a close all her commercial intercourse with the other nations of the world, to whom she would have sold everything, but of whom she would have bought nothing.

Fourthly. To promote that commercial intercourse was, however, the great object of the policy of Colbert. Why, he inquired, should not France participate in the treasures which England and Holland are gathering as each tide floats into their ports vessels from every quarter of the navigable globe? The answer was at hand. The trade of France languished because it was not adequately encouraged by the French government. True, indeed, royal charters had been given to three successive companies trading to the East. But, contenting himself by conferring on them a corporate character, the king had omitted to supply them with corporate funds. Let that omission be remedied; let a new French East India Company be instituted, with all the aids and all the protection which the Crown can bestow, and Havre and Bordeaux shall soon eclipse the mercantile splendour of Rotterdam and Bristol. So reasoned, or so predicted, Colbert; and, at his suggestion, Louis XIV. granted to the new association all that royalty can grant:—the power of making conquests, — dominion over them when made, — exclusive privileges of every known extent and variety, — bounties on all their exports and imports, — a code of laws, — an ecclesiastical establishment, — and even the right of tolerating any heathens, heretics, and infidels, with whom it might be convenient for them to enter into commercial relations. The royal heralds contributed an escutcheon crowded with palm and olive trees, and encircled by the legend *Florebo quocunque ferar*. Artists of another class circulated such delineations of Madagascar (the seat of the projected government) as might best tempt a Picard or Languedocian to exchange his cold, or his arid, home for that earthly paradise. Of the required

capital of fifty millions, Louis himself subscribed three. All aspirants for court favour were encouraged, if not required, to imitate the example. Public defaulters were allowed to liquidate their debts to the treasury by taking shares. Even in the great chamber of the Parliament the chancellor appeared as a suitor to the judges for assistance to this great national undertaking; and those learned persons had to make their reluctant choice between a hazardous speculation and the displeasure of Versailles.

Never was a commercial project so dandled into life by nurses of such high degree, and never were such cares more ineffectual. Before ten years had elapsed the company had become irretrievably bankrupt; and the king assumed the possession and control of their establishments, on the hard condition of paying off their debts.

Nor was this the only attempt made by Colbert to emulate the achievements of the Dutch and English merchants. In North and Central America, in the West Indies and Africa, and in the Levant, he assigned to three mercantile corporations as many distinct fields in which they were to make the fleurs de lys the emblem of successful trade and of maritime greatness. Nothing was withholden from any of them which the Crown could give; — neither privileges — nor monopolies — nor bounties — nor exemptions — nor sovereign powers. Yet the author of these schemes lived long enough to witness the failure of them all, and long enough (as it would seem) to discover that royal patronage was a motive power utterly unable to compete with the energy of individual enterprise.

Still it remained for Colbert to try whether the trade of France might not thrive on the depression, and at the expense, of the trade of all the neighbouring states; and that experiment was commenced in the year 1667, by the enactment of such import duties as would virtually pre-

vent the importation of the cloths and other wrought goods of England and of the United Provinces. The new tariff was to deprive the Dutch of a market indispensable to some of the chief branches of their domestic industry ; but (so, at least, reasoned the great patron of commerce) it would transfer to the capitalists and workmen of France all the profits and all the wages which their neighbours had been accustomed to earn in the markets of that country. He fell into the common mistake of not looking at the subject in that point of view from which it would be regarded by his antagonists. By imposing a high discriminating duty on French wines in favour of the wines of Germany, Holland had in her hands the means of an effective retaliation ; and, after four years had been consumed in unprofitable diplomatic remonstrances, those reprisals were at length made by the States General in the winter of 1670. For thus imitating his own example, and for thus presuming to act on his own principles, Louis, at the suggestion, or at least with the full concurrence, of Colbert, punished the United Provinces by an invasion at the head of 130,000 men, under the immediate command of Condé and Turenne, of Luxembourg and Vauban. By terror and by corruption the gates of all the cities of Holland were at once thrown open at his approach ; and the passage of the Rhine was defended against him just so far as was necessary to give some deceptive colour to the preposterous eulogies which, on the ground of that operation, exalted the courtly Louis to the level of the mighty Julius. Deputies suing for peace arrived from the terrified States at the camp of the invader. Their proposals were rejected with arrogance and insult ; and the victorious king was not ashamed to require, that the rulers of the Seven Provinces should annually transmit to him a medal surrounded by a legend, in which was to be made the acknowledgment that the Dutch people held their liberties of him, and at his pleasure. The insult

sunk deeply into their hearts. In a phrensy of popular madness they massacred John and Cornelius De Witt as faithless to their native land, and as partisans of their hated enemy. The government passed into the hands of William, Prince of Orange, who, after a war of six years, at length concluded with Louis, in August, 1678, the Treaty of Nimeguen. By that treaty, France abandoned the original ground of the quarrel. Her tariff of 1667 was revoked, and either country conceded to the other a full liberty of trade, unimpeded by the grant of any privileges or bounties in which the citizens of both should not equally participate. From this iniquitous contest, therefore, Colbert and his master acquired no real commercial advantage, nor any just military fame. It laid the basis of a costly and humiliating warfare of forty years' continuance; but, on the other hand, it served as an apology for striking some ostentatious medals — for erecting some arrogant statues — and for elevating a splendid triumphal arch at the northern gates of Paris.

Fifthly. To his other cares for the mercantile greatness of France, Colbert added an extreme solicitude to guide, or rather to force, the labour of her artisans into the most profitable channels.

In the 10th and three following centuries, commercial fraternities had been formed in most of the great cities of that kingdom (as of the rest of Europe), for the defence of the handicraftsmen against their feudal lords. When those guilds had effectually repelled oppression from themselves, they began to practise it on others. They were the Communists of that generation, and their history might teach an useful lesson to the Socialists of our own. Their tyranny was directed against all the private artisans who would not, or who could not, join their societies. In Charles V., and in Charles VI., those artisans sought and found defenders against the persecutions of the incorporated brotherhoods. But when Louis XI. invoked

the aid of those companies in his struggle against the seigneurs, he was in his turn compelled to support them in their contest with the independent workmen. Thenceforward their oppressions knew no limit. No man could lawfully carry on his trade unless he became a freeman of one of their incorporations. No man could obtain that freedom except by the payment of admission fees, of a great but arbitrary amount. And before any one could be allowed so to qualify himself, he was required to produce to the guild a specimen of his skill, which *they* should acknowledge to be a *chef d'œuvre*. To many a candidate it was also a matter of extreme difficulty to ascertain what was the guild into which his particular art or craft would authorise him to enter. For those companies were exceedingly numerous, and were engaged in ceaseless and acrimonious disputes with each other as to the precise limits of their respective functions. To determine those knotty questions, the tavern-keepers went to law with the bakers, and the fruiterers with the grocers; and a protracted contest before the courts was necessary to determine the precise point at which the appropriate office of the shoemaker gave place to that of the cobbler. It is with an admiration, not unmixed with awe, that we celebrate the venerable length of years which our own suits in Chancery occasionally attain, but they must be numbered amongst ephemeral litigations, when brought into contrast with the ante-diluvian longevity of some of the judicial controversies between the commercial brotherhoods of France. Thus, the tailors commenced in 1530 an action against the old-clothes-men, which expired in the year 1776, in the 246th year of its age; though not till it had given birth (says M. Clement) to between 20,000 and 30,000 preliminary decrees. And thus, also, in the year 1509, the poulterers commenced a suit against the rôtisseurs, to determine whether, within their privilege of selling rôtis, the defendants were entitled to sell roasted game and poultry. The

Palais de Justice decided, in 1628, that is, in the 120th year of the discussion, that no *rôtisseur* might supply the meat required at any marriage or other festival, unless it were celebrated under his own roof; but that within those domestic precincts, he might sell to any customer “trois plats de viande bouillie, et trois de fricassée;” a judgment which, though it left the main point unsettled, would have done honour to the Court of Barataria, under the presidency of that illustrious judge who has rendered its decisions for ever memorable.

From the time of Louis XI. to that of Louis XIV., the general tendency of the legislation of the kings of France had been to relax the fetters by which the monopoly of the incorporated guilds thus impeded the industry of all other French manufacturers. The only material exception occurred in the reign of Henry IV., who, in deference to the advice of the Notables, assembled at Rouen in 1597, reversed the policy of his immediate predecessors, and restored the companies to their former power. But, in that assembly, the interests and the votes of a large number of rich merchants and master workmen prevailed over their colleagues. In the States General of 1614, on the contrary, where the public opinion of the whole kingdom was freely expressed, these restrictions were condemned as an intolerable grievance.

In Colbert, however, they found a patron of unrivalled authority and zeal. He observed that the relaxation of them which had been practically established, had produced the effect of bringing into the market many manufactured articles, which fell far below the highest attainable standard of excellence. But Colbert's object was to render the cloths, and tapestry, and glass, and silk of France more than equal, in value and in price, to those of England, Flanders, and Italy. To accomplish this design, he promulgated no less than forty-four edicts, or royal regulations, to determine how those articles should be fabricated. The

general character of this singular code may be inferred from the following specimens : —

First. In August, 1666, an edict appeared, reciting, that the serge makers of Aumale had, during some years, had “ an entire liberty of determining, according to their own caprice,” the length and breadth of their cloths, and that, on account of the consequent faults in those articles, the sale of them had greatly diminished. To remedy this evil, it was enacted that the serge makers of the place should be formed into a trading company, enjoying the usual privileges for controlling all workmen in that business.

Secondly. Twelve months later, Colbert promulgated another edict, reciting that the goods produced by the workers in gold, in silver, in silk, in wool, in thread, in dyeing and in bleaching, were not of the requisite quality ; and, therefore, laying down rules for the guidance of them all, in each of their various operations. These rules, in a single case, that of the dyers, comprised no less than 317 distinct articles.

Thirdly. There was a corporation of united barbers, wig-makers, and bathing-house keepers. For their better conduct, Colbert directed that the basins hung out at their shop-windows should always be white, to distinguish them from the surgeons’ basins, which were always to be yellow. The *barbier perruquiers*, and they alone, might sell hair, excepting (added the provident law-giver) any case in which any person may bring his own hair for sale to any wig-maker’s shop.

Fourthly. By another enactment, it was forbidden to any master workmen to keep more than a single apprentice.

Fifthly. In many trades, as, for example, in the trade of *bonneterie* (or hosiery), every aspirant was to serve for five years as an apprentice, and then five years more as a journeyman ; after which he was to produce his *chef d’œuvre*. Thus, in those days, no one in France might

sell a "bonnet," which, under correction, I take to have been originally the French for any female head-dress, who had not studied the art during ten years, and who had not then given proof of perfection in it; — a perfection which (if reliance may be placed on circumstances not entirely unknown to some of us) would seem to be regarded by the best possible judges of the question, as not often attained, and as not easily attainable.

But, sixthly; from these obligations the sons and daughters of master workmen were to a very great extent exempted.

Every one anticipates the results of these puerilities. They tended to confine the manufactures of France to a few privileged families. They gave rise to useless prosecutions, and to many oppressive and unprofitable punishments. They tended to confine the manufacturing business to a few privileged families, and to reduce the number of competitors to the lowest possible amount. They excited from every quarter resentments and remonstrances, which again provoked still more vexatious edicts. One of these, of the 24th December, 1670, ordained that any manufactured goods which should not be in exact conformity to the royal ordinances, should be exhibited on a gibbet nine feet high, bearing the maker's name; and that after twenty-four hours, they should be cut, torn, burnt, or confiscated. For the second offence, the manufacturer was also to receive a public admonition in a full meeting of his guild. But, for the third offence, he was to be put into the stocks for two hours with the fragments of his confiscated property hanging about him; an edict, says Forbonnais, which one might suppose to have been written in Japan. M. Clement, with greater equity, adds that, before affiliating such a law on the Japanese, one ought to ascertain what kind of opinion they would have of it.

After trying in vain the efficacy of penalties, Colbert



resorted to the use of bounties. He gave 1200 livres to every dyer who conformed to his rules. He gave money to every workman who, being himself in the service of such a master, should marry a female fellow-servant. He gave them a premium on the birth of their first child. He gave to every apprentice entering the trade on his own account, both money and tools. And, in favour of some workmen whom he peculiarly cherished, he even gave a great reduction of their tailles.

But the storm and the sunshine were alike ineffectual to ripen the fruits of the French Protectionist husbandry. The trades cherished by Colbert died with him. His policy was, however, more long-lived. The authority of his name maintained, till the eve of the Revolution, and even yet supports in France, a commercial system which all her real statesmen reprobate, but in which many sections of the people find their account.

To what causes, it may be asked, is that authority to be referred, since the measures of Colbert, which I have hitherto noticed, were calculated neither to secure the approbation of the wiser few, nor the favour of the unreflecting many? The answer to that inquiry is neither difficult nor doubtful. No man had ever studied more profoundly, or, perhaps, no man ever judged by a surer instinct, the character of his fellow-countrymen. If some of the measures which he pursued were ill-judged, the common motive of them all was to promote the welfare of the great body of the people of France. That object ever lay nearest to his heart. No statesman was ever actuated by a public spirit more genuine, or by a patriotism more ardent, even when the most ill-directed; and though Colbert has won this praise tardily from generations later than his own, yet it is a praise which, when once firmly won by any ruler of that enthusiastic people, secures to him for all future times the rank and worship of a demi-god among them. The love of country of this great

minister exhibited itself, I think, chiefly, first, in his unrelenting hostility to all abuses and to the authors of them ; secondly, in the splendour and utility of his public works ; thirdly, in his creation of a belligerent marine far more powerful than France had ever before seen or contemplated ; fourthly, in his labours for the improvement of the laws and judicial system of the kingdom ; and, finally, on the patronage which he bestowed on literature, and, therefore, on the literary dispensers of reputation. My limits of time will not allow me to touch on these topics except with great brevity, but I may not altogether pass them over.

First, then, on his accession to power in 1661, Colbert declared war to the knife against the whole brood of speculators, defaulters, and public accountants, by instituting an extraordinary commission, or court of justice, to compel them to disgorge their ill-gotten gains ; and though some parts of his subsequent proceedings for that purpose may not bear the test of a very severe morality, some excuse for his rigour may be found, partly in the habits of the times, and partly in the enormous extravagance of the frauds with which he had undertaken to contend.

The authors, or suspected authors, of them were required to produce and verify statements of all the property which they had acquired by inheritance, or otherwise, during the last preceding twenty-six years, and all the curés and vicars of Paris were directed to call upon the faithful in their respective congregations to denounce all offences against the treasury of which they might be aware, on pain of excommunication in case of disobedience. The results of the proceedings of this tribunal were, first, to effect the restitution to the Crown of one hundred and ten millions of livres ; secondly, to set aside the conveyances of many territorial and other royal rights which had been alienated on no adequate

consideration ; and, thirdly, to reduce, by eight millions, the annual charge for the public debt. So long as this tempest raged against the financiers alone, the citizens of Paris watched the progress of it with exultation ; but the reduction of the dividends payable at the Hôtel de Ville spread alarm, and, for a moment, seemed to threaten a revolt, among all the wealthy inhabitants of that once rebellious city. With the suppression of the Fronde, however, they had ceased to be formidable. Their discontent expressed itself only in impotent murmurs, and in those dismal looks which suggested to Boileau his picture of a "*visage plus pâle qu'un rentier, à l'aspect d'un arrêt qui retranche un quartier.*"

To these retributory measures, Colbert added others for preventing the recurrence of similar abuses. He deprived all fiscal offices of their heritable character. He took from every public accountant securities for the faithful performance of the duties of his office. He exacted of every such officer an habitual residence at his post. He reduced the per centage on all collections of the public revenue. He subjected the estate of every debtor to the Crown to a tacit mortgage for the amount of his debt, which was payable in preference to every other demand. He rendered it necessary that all taxes let to farm should so be disposed of by public auction, and not otherwise. He established a complete system of keeping and rendering accounts of the receipt and application of the public money ; and he devised effective forms and rules for preventing the deviation of any such money from the particular service to which it was properly applicable. Such labours are easily enumerated, and may not collectively assume in the enumeration a very brilliant appearance. But they were such as few other men would have had the diligence, the skill, and the hardihood at once to devise and to enforce.

From the accountants and peculators, Colbert turned to

make war on the dishonest creditors of the state. In the depths of his financial distresses, Mazarin had diverted to the use of the Crown the octrois and other dues exigible in the various cities of France, and applicable there to various purposes of local necessity or convenience. To indemnify the citizens for the consequent prejudice to their municipal interests, the Cardinal, as we formerly saw, administered the singular relief of authorising them to extract from themselves as much more money for recruiting the civic treasuries as he had taken away for the behoof of the national treasury. To escape the burden of this double taxation, the communes everywhere borrowed funds for their indispensable local expenditure. Such funds were, however, unavoidably taken upon an equivocal security; and therefore, at a high rate of interest; and in consequence of these improvident loans, Colbert found nearly the whole of France threatened with a kind of municipal bankruptcy. After ascertaining, by a rigid inquest, what was the amount of debt really due, and to what extent the contracts made with the embarrassed citizens had been fraudulent or usurious, and after establishing a registry in each city of the pecuniary obligations to which each was justly liable, he restored to them all half of the funds which Mazarin had seized, leaving to them the collection and management of the whole of the octrois and other dues which they were thenceforward to divide with the Crown. Applying themselves with new zeal to the improvement of an income in which they were so largely to participate, the communes ere long paid off their debts, and gave a new illustration of the old proverbial truth, that "a half is sometimes greater than the whole."

From the corporation creditors, this sleepless reformer next turned to the Noblesse. To escape their contribution to the tailles and other ordinary taxes, a vast throng of persons had either acquired or laid claim to the privileges

of nobility. Some had bought this honour; some had earned it by the discharge of public offices; and many were indebted for it to their own impudence, or to the favour, not hardly propitiated, of the heralds and genealogists, who were but too well disposed to certify the gentle lineage of all whom they knew to be provided with well lined purses. The poorer roturiers were thus condemned to see one after another of their wealthier brethren withdrawing their shoulders from the pressure of the burden which weighed so heavily, because so exclusively, on their own class or caste of society. Indignant at their sufferings, and full of burning zeal for the interests of the treasury, Colbert attacked this noble phalanx with characteristic decision. With one blow he revoked all titles to nobility which had been acquired within the last preceding thirty years. With another he recovered against the usurpers of noble rank, penalties for that offence, amounting, collectively, to two millions of livres. In every part of France multitudes of parvenus were driven back to the ranks which they had deserted, and were compelled to resume their shares of the load which they had shaken off. In Provence alone, the number who thus shed their false plumage was 1257, all men of mark in their respective vicinities. It is not difficult to imagine how profound was the satisfaction with which all classes of society hailed this signal act of penal justice,—how the ancient nobles rejoiced to be delivered from their undignified associates,—how the meaner ranks were gladdened at the defeat of an arrogant pretension,—and how the tax-payers welcomed back into their lines the fugitives who had left them to suffer alone. The only mourners were they to whom the public faith was dear,—for to them it appeared nothing less than a robbery to receive money for patents of nobility, and then to revoke the grants on no alleged ground except that the money paid had been inadequate to the advantage obtained. But among the praises of Colbert's

administration, and of the age of Louis XIV., a strict integrity in public affairs held no place.

In the custom-houses of France the great minister found his next antagonists. On his accession to power *export* duties were payable, not only on the removal of merchandise beyond the limits of the kingdom, but even when they were removed from one province to another. Nor were the rates of those duties the same in any two provinces. Although the absurdity and the mischiefs of this system baffle description, they may be illustrated by the example of what were called the Customs of Valence. At that place a duty of from three to five per cent. *ad valorem* was payable, first, on all goods brought into Lyons from Languedoc, from Provence, from the Levant, or from Spain; and, secondly, upon all goods brought from the eastern provinces of France into Languedoc, Provence, or Piedmont. To secure the payment of these duties, all articles subject to them were to be brought to Valence, however great might be the deviation from the shorter and more convenient route; and a vast cordon of revenue officers was accordingly drawn, as a kind of net, round no less than nine of the principal provinces of the kingdom. To abolish this and all other local tariffs, and to substitute for them one general scale of customs duties applicable only to the external trade of France, that so the intercourse between the different parts of the realm might be entirely free, was a scheme to which Colbert devoted all the energies of his mind, and all the delegated authority and influence of the Crown. He was, however, opposed by the multitudes who had a vested or a prospective interest in these strange abuses. He was opposed also by that still greater and more irrational multitude which found in the commercial isolation of their respective provinces food with which to nourish their provincial prejudices. And in many parts of the kingdom those prejudices found supporters, and Colbert antagonists, in the

old provincial states which still maintained their languid and decaying existence. Before such adversaries he at last recoiled. Some of the provinces resisted the proposed tariff altogether, and, so far as commerce was concerned, they were allowed to remain and to be described as provinces on the footing of foreign countries. Other provinces demanded and obtained the maintenance of all their old and distinctive laws of customs, and they were thenceforward known as the foreign provinces. But about half of France acquiesced in the new and uniform tariff, and that part of the realm acquired the fiscal designation of the "Five great farms." With this incomplete success Colbert was obliged to be content. He had planted the vigorous shoots of a great future improvement. Yet so slow was their growth that (strange as it now sounds to us) the French Revolution still found the *Douane de Valence* and the "Five great farms" in full vigour, and swept them away among the throng of obsolete anomalies.

But, secondly, the ambition of Colbert was of too noble a character to be satisfied with increasing the public revenue, by the punishment or prevention of abuses, or by the establishment of new tariffs. He aimed to explore and open new sources of national wealth; and with that view became not merely the patron, but even the author, of some of the noblest of the public works of France, and especially of the great scheme, so often meditated by others, of uniting the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. To Pierre Paul de Riquet is, indeed, due the praise of all the science which devised, and of all the energy which actually accomplished, the Canal of Languedoc. Without presuming to explain the mechanical contrivances by which he subdued the obstacles which nature seemed to have opposed to that undertaking, I believe I am safe in asserting that, when due allowance is made for the inexperience of his age, Riquet exhibited in that great work an extent of genius, and a variety of resources, which entitle him to a high

place amongst the greatest engineers of modern times. The appropriate praise of Colbert is, that he appreciated the capacity, admired the energy, and sustained the courage of his great agent in this scheme, — that he continued to hope while others desponded, and was unmoved by all the expostulations and ridicule by which the prophets of evil, and the speakers of evil, of those days would have arrested the enterprise, — and that, in the midst of all other demands on the public treasury, he advanced from that source one-half of the indispensable outlay. Corneille has celebrated the junction of the two seas in some noble verses, whose only fault is that they say far too much of Louis XIV., and nothing at all of Riquet or of Colbert. Vauban, after traversing the whole length of the canal, and admiring the labours of a genius so kindred to his own, pronounced an eulogy more generous than that of the great dramatist: “The work (he said) is absolutely perfect, with one exception — I have looked in vain for a statue of Riquet.”

Thirdly. It was, however, neither as a financier, nor as an economist, that Colbert chiefly acquired the high place which he retains in the admiration of all Frenchmen. His higher, or at least his more effective, claim to their gratitude is, that by him France was first elevated into the foremost rank of maritime powers, so far at least as that rank depends on the possession of a belligerent navy. In 1661, the date of his accession to power, she possessed 30 ships of war, of which 3 were of the first class, 8 of the second, and 7 of the third, the rest being small craft only. At the peace of Nimeguen, in 1678, the royal navy comprised 120 ships of war, of which 12 were of the first class, 26 of the second, and 40 of the third. Five years later, the number had arisen to no less than 273 vessels of all classes, of which 139 were either ships of war or frigates. To man this vast navy, Colbert established a law, not unlike the maritime conscription law of France at the



present day; and such was its success that, in the year 1670, the number of seamen registered under it amounted to 30,000; and, after the lapse of thirteen years (that is, in 1683) to 77,852. Neither honours nor emoluments were spared to animate the courage of the force thus rapidly called into existence; and, in his official intercourse with his naval commanders, Colbert relaxed his habitual austerity, and cheerfully indulged them in the roughness of manners, and petulance of temper, for which their employment afforded at once the temptation and the apology.

His zeal for this branch of the public service showed itself in other, and yet more laborious, cares. He employed lawyers of great eminence to compile a code of laws for the government of the French navy; and the *Ordonnance sur la Marine*, which he at length promulgated, rapidly acquired that universal admiration which has ever since followed it. The praise of this great work must, of course, be divided between Colbert and the subordinate agents whom he employed in the execution of it; and, for the same reason, I hesitate to subscribe to the eulogies which he has so largely received as the author of the other codes of law, which were promulgated during his administration. On his accession to power, some of the provinces of France were governed by ancient customs or traditions. Some of them lived under the *droit écrit*, or ancient laws of Rome. In some, the provincial jurisprudence was the result of a fusion of the *corpus juris civilis* and of customs borrowed from many different localities. And, in all, the rule for the observance of the people in their transactions with each other, and for the guidance of the judges in their decisions, was, to a great extent, doubtful and indeterminate. To reduce this chaos into order, Colbert employed Lamoignon, and others of the greatest jurists of his times; and, in the years 1667, 1669, 1670, and 1673, appeared four codes, the result of their labours, and, as it is said, of Colbert's superintendence and revision of them. They were known

as the *Ordonnance pour la Réformation de la Justice Civile*—as the *Règlement général pour les Eaux et Forêts*—as the *Ordonnance Criminelle*—and as the *Ordonnance de Commerce*. During one hundred and thirty years, and until superseded by the *Code Napoléon*, they formed the basis of the law of France, both civil and penal. But as the name of Justinian was superscribed to the work of Tribonian and his fellow-labourers, and as the name of Napoleon has been given to the compilation of Cambécères and his colleagues, so has the name of Louis XIV. been attached to that of Colbert, of Lamoignon, and his associates. For in civil, as in military, life the laurel is habitually assigned to the leader under whose auspices the victory has been won, rather than to the subordinates by whose toil, and ability, and self-sacrifice it may have been really gained; and, in this distribution of fame, there is sometimes more substantial equity, and always more public convenience, than might be supposed by those who never, either as leaders or as subordinates, wielded either sword or pen in such a controversy.

Finally. No man ever understood better than Colbert, the importance of the suffrages of those by whom the pen is so wielded as an instrument of dominion over mankind. To many of them he granted pensions; and in the list of his pensioners, amidst many heroes of the French Dunciad, occur the names of Pierre Corneille, with his description as “le premier poète dramatique du monde”—of Molière, “excellent poète comique”—of the *Sieur Racine*, “poète Français”—and of le *Sieur Mézerai*, “historiographe.” The favour of many foreign writers was wooed in the same persuasive manner; but among them I see no Englishman, nor, with the exception of Huyghens, any name more eminent than that of Isaac Vossius. To take other securities for the permanency of his own reputation, Colbert established the Academies of Sciences, of Painting, and of Inscriptions. The last of

these was so called, because its peculiar office was that of devising inscriptions in honour of the great king of France, and in celebration of his triumphs, military and civil. As far as Louis himself is concerned, however, no great gratitude is due to this company of eulogists; for, among many other extravagances, he was indebted to them for his famous device of the sun rising over the world, with the legend, "*Nec pluribus impar*;" a boast, perhaps, as ambiguous in its meaning, as it was arrogant in its appearance, and offensive in its effect. The interpretation of it by Louis himself, in his instructions to the Dauphin, is, I suppose, the right one. It is that, adequate as he had proved himself to be to the conduct of so many great affairs, he would not have been inadequate to the government of many other of the kingdoms of the earth, if they, like France, had been brought, or should be brought, within the radiance of his solar beams. If such be, indeed, the sense which the authors of this metallurgic hyperbole intended it to convey, it was as unjust as it was extravagant. For, beyond all dispute, the boasted sufficiency to such, and so many great undertakings, belonged, not to Louis himself, but to his great minister, Colbert. In some of these he had greatly erred. But in all of them, by turns, he had exhibited a range of knowledge, an energy of application, a contempt for difficulty and for danger, and a zeal for the glory, the greatness, and the welfare of his country, which entitles him to an eminent place among the most illustrious statesmen, who have impressed an indelible trace of their lives and labours on the history of mankind.

To Colbert, however, no such honour was rendered, either by the king whom he had so well served, or by the people for whom he had so diligently laboured. Louis had long been overawed by the genius of his great minister. The forms of submission and deference had, indeed, been as studiously maintained by the subordinate, as they had

been rigidly exacted by the superior. The austere and frugal comptroller-general had even indicted eulogies on the Grand Monarque, and had projected costly monumental works in honour of his conquests. The homage was coldly received, while the substantial power, which it was intended to conceal, was suspiciously resented. With the peace of Nimeguen, Louis had regained his insatiable passion for buildings and other selfish expenditure; and as Versailles, Trianon, Marly, the gigantic aqueduct of Maintenon, and the edifices of the Place Vendôme, one after another drained the resources which Colbert had accumulated, his scruples and remonstrances became a continual rebuke, and a serious obstacle, to the extravagance of his master. With his pride wounded, and his temper irritated, the king at length inflicted on the aged statesman some of those indignities which, when coming from him, withered the very souls of those who worshipped at that idolatrous court. Already worn out by labour and disease, the heart-broken old man sickened and died; and when the last letter he was ever to receive from Louis reached him, he refused to read it, exclaiming, in the bitterness of his soul, in words like those of Wolsey, "If I had but served my God as faithfully as I have served this man, I should long since have worked out my salvation. But now what awaits me!"

Nor were the people of France more grateful than their sovereign to their aged servant. His death was hailed at Paris by a perfect storm of satirical epigrams, and, to rescue his body from the anticipated outrages of the Parisians, it was conveyed by night from his hotel to the place of interment under a strong military escort.

The catastrophe is not without its moral. If, among those whom I address, there be any who are proposing to devote all the powers of their souls and bodies to the service of the state, but who may not hope either to command her armies in the field, or to lead her parties in the

senate, let them not shrink from that most severe and thankless service ; but let them learn betimes to look to the approbation of God and of their own consciences as their only reward. If they should bring all the energies and all the virtues of Colbert to their appointed offices, they will assuredly find a Louis XIV. to appropriate to himself the glory of their labours, and an ignorant multitude to exact from them the expiation of his incapacity, and faults, and blunders.

At the death of Colbert it became necessary to reconstitute the administration of which he had been the real, though the unavowed, head, and especially to replace him in the office of comptroller-general by a successor who would at once have skill to replenish the treasury, and meekness to acquiesce in the improvident exhaustion of it. But it was above all things essential that the choice should appear to Louis to be his own unprompted and spontaneous act. It deserves to be told how he was beguiled into that belief.

"What think you," said he to the Chancellor le Tellier, "of Le Pelletier as my new minister of finance?" "Sire," answered the sagacious lawyer, "that is a subject on which I have no claim to your confidence. He is the son of my guardian, and I have, therefore, always regarded him as my own child." "No matter," replied the king, "tell me what is your opinion of him." "My opinion then is, sire, that he is upright, honourable, and industrious ; but he is unfit to be a minister of finance ; he is not severe enough." "What," rejoined Louis, "do you suppose I wish that any of my servants should be severe to my subjects ? Since he is faithful and diligent, I appoint him to be my comptroller-general." The king believed the decision to be his own, and was wilfully blind to the motives which had induced the chancellor so skillfully to draw him into it.

To tread firmly in the steps of a great administrator

his successor must be himself great. To that praise Le Pelletier was not entitled. He was one of those many politicians (weak men they usually are) to whom nothing is so dear as the reputation of independence and originality of thought. It was therefore his pleasure to reverse, as far as possible, the measures of his predecessor. Because Colbert had opposed the sale of public offices—and had reduced the *taille* (of all taxes the most oppressive)—and had braved every difficulty to avoid an increase of the funded debt, Le Pelletier increased the emoluments of many public offices, that he might sell them with the greater facility—increased the *taille* to the extent of six millions per annum—and raised new loans on such terms as would most effectually excite the cupidity of the money lenders. He adhered to the example of Colbert only where that example was most evidently injudicious. Like that great minister, he took commerce under his patronage by restraints, and bounties, and protections; and, like him, he prosecuted with rigour every one who had, honestly or dishonestly, grown rich in the fiscal service of the Crown. The result of course was to induce all public accountants in future to indemnify themselves against the cost of this anticipated expiatory audit, by an unscrupulous abuse of their opportunities of gain.

Without having provoked any serious reproach, or having obtained any cordial applause, Le Pelletier ere long resigned his office, to avoid the responsibility of conducting the financial affairs of Louis XIV. during the war of the League of Augsburg. It was a prospect before which a firmer spirit than his might have quailed. The armies of France were raised to the enormous number of 450,000 men, and her naval armaments were such as had never before left her ports. In his attempt to provide for the expense of these gigantic forces, Pontchartrain, the new comptroller-general, exhausted all the resources of which the archives of his office contained any precedent,

until he reached, at last, the expedient to which the States General had resorted immediately after the fatal battle of Poitiers, and the consequent captivity of John. This was the capitation tax, a tribute imposed on every Frenchman, but not on all men to the same extent. They were marshalled in twenty-two classes, descending in rank, and in supposed capacity to sustain this burden, from the princes of the blood to the peasantry. All class-fellows were to pay an equal amount: in the first class it rose to two thousand livres, in the lowest class it sank to ten sous; the rich thus paying according to their wealth, and the poor according to their poverty.

This was nothing less than a great social revolution. Nearly four centuries had elapsed since the fiscal immunities of the clergy and the noblesse had ever been thus rudely invaded, and that encroachment had, in those early times, been vindicated by the consent of the representatives of the people, and by the necessity of rescuing the kingdom from the grasp of the Anglo-Norman Plantagenets. But the capitation tax of Louis XIV. was imposed to support a war, not of defence, but of aggression, and was levied by the unaided authority of the king himself. It was the greatest of all the *coups d'état* of his unscrupulous reign; it was so great that even he found it necessary to apologise in the preamble of his ordinance for making such a demand on his people; declaring it to be a sacrifice which could be justified only by extreme necessity, and which ought not to be continued after that necessity should have passed away. The cessation of it was therefore promised at the end of three months from the return of peace.

The promise was faithfully observed: within three months from the date of the Treaty of Ryswick, the capitation tax was abandoned. The French privileged orders were thus rescued from this galling though transient fiscal equality with the commons,—with those

whom they were accustomed, contemptuously, to call "La gent corveeable et tailléable à merci"; and to the shoulders of the commons was once more transferred the undivided load of direct taxation. It was a burden scarcely to be endured: so at least we must judge, unless we reject the concurrent testimonies of the Duc de Bourgogne, of the Comte de Boulainvilliers, and of Marshal Vauban. The duke, who was the grandson of Louis XIV., and the count, who was his most intimate personal friend, drew up, at this period, a joint report on the condition of the French people, which was in effect an epitome of the reports made to themselves by all the intendants and sub-intendants throughout the kingdom. The marshal prepared a memoir on the same subject, derived from the inquiries which he had, in his own person, pursued during many successive years. The duke, the count, and the marshal all concur in depicting the condition of all classes of society, except the highest, in colours so dark and gloomy, that if proceeding from any less credible witnesses, one should be tempted to regard their representations as altogether extravagant and incredible; nor can I altogether resist that suspicion. Although no men of greater wisdom, patriotism, or diligence, ever addressed themselves to such an inquiry, I know not how to avoid the belief that their views did not penetrate much below the surface; for if they were right, France was poverty-stricken in every province, and almost in every city and canton, in every branch of industry, and in all ranks, classes, and divisions of society. And yet their reports had scarcely been made, when the war of the Spanish Succession began, a war which, during twelve successive years, subjected the resources of France to a strain incomparably more severe than they had ever before endured. Then came long years of humiliation, of accumulated disasters, and of scarcities, almost assuming the character of famine; and yet, year after year, the



French treasury incurred a boundless expenditure, and the arms of France at length conquered a peace, and, with it, the dominion of the House of Bourbon over the Spanish monarchy. The reconciliation of these indisputable facts, with the facts alleged by the Duc de Bourgogne by Boulainvilliers and by Vauban, seems to me impossible. I infer therefore, that they unconsciously exaggerated the dark aspect of the spectacle before them, and that they had no adequate conception of the inherent energies of the French people, and of the indestructible wealth of the soil and the commerce of France.

The financial records of the war of the Spanish Succession may help to explain how a nation plunged, as it was supposed, in such depths of wretchedness, was yet able, during twelve campaigns, to make such a series of gigantic efforts. The secret is simply that, at the bidding of this new and terrible necessity, the rich and the great were compelled to sustain, in some reasonable proportion to their wealth, the public expenditure which had till then been borne by the necessitous and the obscure. There are four principal steps by which this change was, slowly, indeed, but at length effectually, established.

First. The capitation tax of the war of the League of Augsburg was revived. The revival of it was, indeed, qualified by conditions not to be reconciled with the abstract principle of the equality of fiscal burdens. For although the tax in its new form affected every class of society, yet the higher classes, such as the clergy, the noblesse, the magistracy, and the bourgeoisie of the municipalities, were each authorised to commute their individual liabilities for payments to be made by each of those bodies collectively. On the other hand, all those persons who did not belong to any such organised body, as, for example, the peasantry, and such mechanics as were not members of any incorporated guilds, were each individually required to pay the precise amount of the tribute exigible from the members of

the class to which they severally belonged. Now it was almost a matter of course that the contributors to the commuted charge, paid less, in proportion, than those who were reached by the personal and separate assessment.

Secondly. It is not without an accidental interest to us at the present moment to record that the tax on successions to immovable property is no discovery of our existing financiers. It was one of the imposts by which Pontchartrain, the then comptroller-general of France, sought to equalise the fiscal pressure on the French people in the beginning of the 18th century. But our parliament has not yet advanced so far in this policy as the councillors of Louis XIV., for under his ordinance the duty was payable not only when the heir succeeded to his ancestor, but as often as the estate might be alienated by any sale, or other act *inter vivos*.

Thirdly. During the war of the Spanish Succession resort was frequently had to the most impolitic measure of raising or depressing the nominal or exchangeable value of the current gold and silver money, as the convenience of the public treasury from time to time required, and, to accomplish this end, all the outstanding coins were frequently called in to be re-issued at the mint with more or less of alloy. Now, during the slow process of the re-coinage, great difficulty arose in finding a medium of commercial exchange of sufficient amount; and, to supply that want, the directors of the mint gave to the depositors of bullion notes, promising to repay the amount of their deposits at a future but early time. Such notes, being transferable by mere delivery, became, like our own bank-notes, a convenient and favourite substitute for cash. This occurrence gave birth to a great financial innovation. When it was found that the paper-mill and the printing press could yield a treasure as copious as that of the Peruvian mines, and still more convenient, the new gold-fields were supposed to be inexhaustible, and were wrought

with, what we might now call, a Californian or Australian ardour. These proceedings of the mint were imitated at every department charged with the collection of any branch of the revenue. Each of those offices began to circulate notes promising the payment of money at a time coincident with its own expected receipt of some tax or impost. By means of these anticipations, as they were called, the income of any future period could be forestalled silently and without the inconvenience of a public loan. So rapid was the growth of the practice, that, in the sixth year of the war, the income of the seventh and of the eighth year had thus been anticipated. The promissory notes of the government, at that time, amounting to four hundred and thirteen millions, came then first to be designated as the floating or unfunded debt. It was a debt at once more easily contracted, and more burdensome, than any other; for, by the express terms of the notes, the holder of them was entitled to receive in the current year not only the stipulated rate of interest, but some definite proportion of the principal. The consequence was that, in the year 1707, nine tenths of the whole annual revenue were required to meet the payments which, in that year, would fall due to the holders of the unfunded debt. The sum remaining applicable to the public service fell short by one hundred and seventy-seven millions of the indispensable exigencies of the state.

Desmaretz was at this time comptroller-general. He was the nephew of Colbert, and encountered this formidable emergency with a decision which his great kinsman might have applauded as a statesman, however much it was at variance with the principles which, as an economist, he maintained in ordinary times. To support the credit of the government paper, Desmaretz offered to exchange any quantity of it for current coin of the same amount which might be brought to the mint within a definite and short period; and he announced that, from that period, the coin

age would undergo such a change as would render the possession of the notes more advantageous than the possession of their nominal equivalents in specie. He also funded, that is he commuted for permanent annuities, a large part of the floating debt. On the plea of necessity—a plea never more truly alleged—he, by a mere act of power, postponed the period for discharging another large proportion of that debt. Finally, he borrowed large sums of money, by persuasion when possible, and when persuasion failed, by force. If you should reprobate these measures as the arbitrary and desperate plunges of despotism in distress, it would not be in my power to repel that censure. I maintain only that they were indicated by the extremity of the danger; and that, however unjust to the immediate sufferers, they formed a most important advance in transferring the fiscal burdens from necessitous peasants and artisans to that far wealthier class of society who are interested in floating or in funded debts, in spontaneous or in compulsory loans.

Fourthly. But the great democratic principle of equality in fiscal matters was still to be vindicated yet more impressively against the privileged orders of France. In the year 1709, Louis XIV. had to drink the bitter cup of humiliation to the dregs. At that disastrous moment, his financiers were compelled to resort again to the period of the English invasions, and to the records of the States General of John and of Charles VI., for a financial precedent befitting so terrible a crisis. In those archives was found the plan of an impost which had been sanctioned by the representatives of the people in that early age. It resembled the subsidies which the English parliament had in those times been accustomed to grant, or rather the property tax with which in our own time we have become so painfully familiar. Sully had speculated on the substitution of such a duty for the vexatious multitude of improvident charges by which the national treasury was

replenished. That plan had been adopted and matured by Marshal Vauban, who, in his celebrated memoir, had recommended what was called the Royal Tithe, that is an income tax of ten per cent. on all incomes derived from capital or from any public office, which royal tithe, according to the plan of the projector, was to be the price of the deliverance of the whole kingdom from the fiscal oppressions under which it groaned. For this menaced warfare on the whole college of tax-gatherers and public accountants, Vauban had to pay the usual and appropriate penalties of calumny, hatred, and persecution. Desmaretz, more fortunate, reduced Vauban's plan to action, and was rewarded by an enthusiastic applause and gratitude. The allies, intoxicated with success, had kindled the loyalty of the French people, by rude and reckless insults directed at the person of their king. The wounded sense of national honour assured Desmaretz of their support in every measure, however stringent, which might be requisite for the vindication of it. Nor had *he* to fear the enmity of the revenue officers. The royal tithe in *his* hands was not to be a substitution for other imposts, but an addition to them. The gains and the importance of the tax-gatherer were not to be diminished, but increased. The burdens of the tax-payer were not to be shifted, but augmented ; and the augmentation was to be at the expense, not of the poor and humble, but of the rich and great. The springs of public wealth and spirit bore up bravely under this new pressure. The produce of the royal tithe, indeed, fell far short of Vauban's estimate. But the effects of imposing it exceeded his highest hopes. On the security of that revenue, the French treasury borrowed the funds and maintained the armies by which Berwick and Villars triumphed, and by means of which France was at length enabled to obtain the pacification of Utrecht, and to dictate her own terms of peace at Radstadt.

The disasters of the war of the Spanish Succession

would hardly have been too high a price of knowledge, if they had taught the French government and people how vast were the financial resources at their command under an equal system of taxation, and how indissolubly the national welfare was connected with a just apportionment between all classes of the national burdens. But impressively as that simple truth had been inculcated on the men of that generation, it was not given to them to learn it. On the first return of peace, indeed, it was found scarcely at once possible to attempt such an adjustment. The national debt was so vast, and all the national establishments were at once so enormous and so disorganised, that Louis XIV. died without being able to remit any of the taxes, ordinary or extraordinary. He had to find an annual income of about ninety-seven millions of livres, in order to pay the interest of a debt of more than two thousand millions. An army of more than one hundred thousand revenue officers were employed to collect the national revenue, half of which, for each of the two years following the king's death, had already been expended by anticipations. The farmers-general, as they alleged, had also advanced to the king the whole of their receipts in respect of the year in which he died, in obedience to those royal orders (*Ordonnances du Comptant*) the authority of which might not be disputed, and the motives of which could not be investigated. The floating debt, or government paper, had fallen so low in the market, that a promissory note for one hundred livres might be purchased for thirty-six livres in hard cash. Nor was this poverty and discredit confined to the royal fisc. Ruined in the military service of the Crown, the noblesse were overwhelmed with debt. The magistrates, unable to obtain the payment of their salaries, were living on money borrowed at an enormous usury. All foreign commerce was annihilated. Extensive estates were thrown out of culture, and abandoned to waste in every province of the

kingdom; and the peasantry emigrated in large bodies, especially from the frontier provinces, to gain in other lands the subsistence which they were no longer able to earn in their own.

Such was the financial state of affairs to the administration of which the Regent Duke of Orleans succeeded. He addressed himself to the discharge of that arduous task by pursuing at different times two successive and widely dissimilar systems. They may be distinguished from each other as those of the Duc de Noailles and of Law, the respective projectors and advisers of each of them.

Noailles was a man of great eminence, both as a general, a courtier, and a statesman. In each of those characters he gave proof of an unassailable integrity, and of a genius which, though not of the highest order, was eminently adroit and flexible. Among the various councils with which the Regent at first affected to share his authority, the Council of Finance was that over which De Noailles was appointed to preside. Of his colleagues there, some advocated a national bankruptcy, and some, among whom St. Simon was the most conspicuous, insisted on the convention of the States General. The honour of De Noailles was revolted by the first of these proposals, his sense of what was due to the prerogatives of the infant king by the second. Retrenchment, economy, and a return to the maxims of Colbert, were his watchwords; and in effecting these objects, the four celebrated brothers, known by their parental name of Paris, were his agents. He could have made no better choice. Even in that age, corrupt and calumnious as it was, they maintained to the last an unsullied reputation for personal honour, for profound financial knowledge, and for unrivalled skill in the use of it. By their assistance De Noailles effected some great reforms. He enforced from the revenue officers a distinct account of their receipts and disbursements, and a prompt

payment of their balances. He borrowed whatever more was wanting to discharge all the more urgent public liabilities. He re-established the regulations of Colbert for keeping and auditing the public accounts. He reduced the excessive emoluments of some public officers, and abridged the list of pensions and allowances with a hand so firm as not to spare entirely those of the princes of the blood. Then turning from the stipendiaries of the state to the public creditors, he closely scrutinised the grounds of their various claims, amounting collectively to five hundred and ninety-six millions and a half of livres. Of these he admitted the validity of two hundred and fifty millions only; and to liquidate that sum he issued a new government paper, called State Bills, bearing interest at a rate of four per cent. per annum.

It is utterly impossible now to unravel these calculations, or to decide, with any confidence, whether the rejection of nearly 350 millions of claims on the state was an equitable judgment by which the knot was untied, or was an arbitrary rule by which it was cut. I surmise, however, that, at the best, it was an act of rude and impatient justice; for the justice of those times was little else than the retaliation of wrongs; and, if this reduction was itself iniquitous, it was doubtless provoked by still greater iniquities. That it was so, I conjecture chiefly because the next step of De Noailles and his associates was manifestly incapable of any valid defence. Having ascertained that certain parts of the national debt had originally been contracted on terms unduly advantageous to the money-lenders, they struck off, on that plea, capital sums amounting to twenty-four millions and a half,—a plea which, it must be confessed, some of the repudiating States of America have ventured to repeat in our own days, though not without incurring the reprobation of the whole civilised world.

The financiers, of whom De Noailles was the head, signalised their zeal, however, by other and less questionable



reforms than these; by suppressing many useless offices; by diminishing many burdensome taxes; by forbidding the seizure of utensils in husbandry, even at the suit of the Crown; and by preventing the arbitrary exaction of food and forage for the use of the king's troops. They allowed a free export of corn not only from province to province, but beyond the limits of the kingdom; they advanced money to aid the return of the French emigrants to France; and they abolished at least one great commercial monopoly.

To these measures, on the whole so enlightened and so salutary, succeeded another eminently ill advised. It was a judicial crusade against every public accountant who had enriched himself during the war of the Spanish Succession. For their trial was erected a new tribunal, which, from its zeal to convict and punish, acquired the appropriate title of *La Chambre Ardente*. In a single year that tribunal tried no less than five thousand persons for imputed frauds against the royal treasury. It was a Reign of Terror, disguised under the semblance of a Reign of Law. To be rich became of all crimes the most fatal. Wealth was concealed with all the ingenuity of fear. Whatever was regarded as indicating it—as, for example, plate, equipages, or splendid dress, or furniture—was nowhere to be seen. There was, for the time, an end to all those trades which minister to luxury. Some public contractors were sent to the galleys. The dismal apparatus of death became almost as familiar to the citizens of Paris under the Regency as it was afterwards under the Republic. Every private household was disturbed by domiciliary visits, or by the dread of them. Informers, allured by a promised participation in forfeitures, found their way into every social circle, and destroyed the confidence of domestic life. Some public accountants denounced *themselves*, in the vain hope of impunity: some, with better judgment, corrupted their judges, or the favourites or paramours of the regent. In his profligate court was established a kind of tariff of the

price at which indemnity might be purchased, according to the rank or the fortune of the suitor; while, as if to minister to this infamous traffic, the *Chambre Ardente* published lists of the proscribed persons against whom its vengeance was *about* to be directed.

The unavoidable reaction soon followed. Remonstrances from some of the French parliaments, petitions from many commercial bodies, and songs and pasquinades from the Parisians, rendered the *Chambre Ardente* first hateful, then ridiculous, and then impotent; until, at length, the dissolution of it was solemnly pronounced by D'Aguesseau in his character of chancellor. The sentence, however equitable and popular, was not delivered in time to rescue the government from the odium of this judicial despotism, or from the reproach of having resorted to it in vain; for although the court had imposed penalties exceeding two hundred and fifty millions, yet of that sum fifteen millions only actually reached the public treasury; the remaining two hundred and thirty-five millions having either been remitted by bribery, or intercepted in its way to the treasury by excessive fees and expenses, or by more direct peculation.

The financial system which I have ascribed to the Duc de Noailles (though for much of it he was not justly responsible) was too feeble to grapple with the embarrassments which the Regent inherited from Louis XIV. By some judicious measures, and some audacious efforts, the government had succeeded in averting the threatened bankruptcy, and in obtaining a respite from their more urgent difficulties. But to restore an equilibrium between the revenue and the expenditure appeared almost hopeless, when the most famous of all financial adventurers appeared on the scene, to change the whole aspect of affairs, and even to accomplish a memorable change in the national character and habits of the French people.

You will, of course, perceive that I am referring to

John Law and to his Mississippi scheme. On that topic, however, I do not propose to enter, partly because it hardly falls within the general scope of these Lectures, and partly because M. Thiers has brought together, within a very short compass, and with a completeness and perspicuity which few men, if any, could emulate, whatever is necessary to the right understanding of that most curious episode in the history of France. From M. Thiers you will easily and exactly learn what were the strange steps by which Law succeeded in elevating the French people into a calenture of commercial speculation, and thence to bring them down to what was little, if at all, short of a national bankruptcy. It was not long afterwards followed by the death of the Regent Duke of Orleans and by the transfer of the administration of affairs into the hands of the Duc de Bourbon. He signalled his accession to power by the establishment of a new tax, called the Cinquantième,—an impost, that is, of two per cent., to be paid in kind on the gross produce of land, and to be collected in money on all incomes derived from any other source. It was to continue in force for twelve years, and was declared to be exclusively applicable to the payment of the interest of the national debt,—a purpose to which, however, it was never in fact applied.

Cardinal Fleury, the successor of the duke, revoked the Cinquantième, and determined to find a revenue in parsimony. He was a man of no pre-eminent ability, either as a financier or otherwise, but, armed with good sense, moderation, the love of peace, and honest purposes, he persevered to the end of his ministry, and under the pressure of extreme decrepitude, in carrying into effect a series of unostentatious reforms, and in defending the national purse against the cupidity of the courtiers of his sovereign. His most meritorious fiscal operations were the disposing by public competition, rather than by personal favour, of the farms of the public taxes, and his

fixing definitively the mint price of silver, so as to prevent from that time forward all arbitrary fluctuations in the inherent value of the monetary standard. His less skilful measures were a general remission of all taxes in arrear, which inevitably encouraged the growth of similar arrears in future; and the grant from the public treasury of large sums for the relief of sufferers from local calamities, which, of course, dried up the springs both of private charity, and of future foresight, in those localities. Two wars were forced upon Fleury, and extraordinary taxes were raised for supporting them. Yet he enjoyed the glory, scarcely imagined by any other finance minister of France in the 18th century, of raising the receipt almost to a level with the expenditure of the treasury. This, however, is true only of a single year, the year 1738, the historians of which record, with extreme astonishment, that the deficiency did not exceed a million of francs.

Orry, who held the office of comptroller-general under Fleury, became on his death an independent financial minister. But Orry appears to have been a commonplace man, with no original resources in his own mind or character. To raise money by loans and by the creation and sale of useless public offices, and to save money by casting the whole charge of the administration of justice on the suitors, were his only new ways and means. His true praise is to have had too much spirit and honesty for the times in which he lived. He was honoured by the enmity of Madame de Pompadour, and was dismissed from his office for his refusal to supply the boundless waste in which it was her pleasure to involve her royal paramour.

The office of comptroller-general then passed from one obscure hand to another until it had been occupied by no less than fourteen persons in succession, in the reign of Louis XV. Among them, the only names which occupy any conspicuous place in history are those of

Machault, Terray, and De Silhouette. A brief view of the financial administration of each of them will place you in possession of the principal causes of the pecuniary distress of which Louis the XVI. was the hapless inheritor.

Machault accepted the office of comptroller-general in December, 1745; he retained it to the year 1754. He was a man of ability, and, according to the standard of morals of his age, he may also pass for a man of integrity and public spirit. Orry's fall was indeed a warning which Machault did not disregard; and during some years he retained his power by such an acquiescence in the prodigalities of Madame de Pompadour as she could not have obtained from the more severe virtue of his predecessor. The demands of the war also pressed heavily upon him; and when in the year 1748 it was closed by a humiliating peace, France was burthened by an increased debt of one thousand two hundred millions, and with an addition of one hundred per cent. upon all the duties to which she had been previously liable. With the return of peace, Machault put forth all the resources of his mind to encounter the fiscal disorder which was thus preying on the vitals of the state, and signalised himself by two measures, each of which was much applauded by his own age, though one of them will scarcely command the admiration of any part of the civilised world in ours. It was nothing else than a recurrence to Colbert's system of protective duties; and it needs scarcely to be added that Machault failed to make his country rich by narrowing her markets. His other project was that of gradually extinguishing the national debt by means of a tax of five per cent., to be levied indiscriminately on all incomes, and from all the different orders in the kingdom. Other imposts of this kind had been of temporary duration. This was to be permanent. The unavowed design of its author is said to have been gradually to extend the rate

of the income tax until the annual product of it should have been sufficient to supersede the *taille*, the *corvée*, and the *gabelle*, and all the other vexatious and unequal imposts under which the people at large were then groaning. The people of France were neither enlightened nor virtuous enough for such an innovation.\* The *Pays d'Etat* resisted it as an infringement of their privileges; the clergy opposed it as violating the liberties of the Church; and the parliaments refused to register the royal edict for carrying it into effect. During six years the government had courage enough to struggle against these combined forces. By perseverance and address the *Pays d'Etat* and the parliaments were induced to yield; but the clergy were inflexible. They loudly denounced the sinfulness of such an invasion of the consecrated treasure of which they were the guardians and usufructaries. Nor did they remonstrate in vain. Louis XV. was chargeable with sins not less public than this meditated sacrilege, and far more grievous. He was, in fact, at the mercy of the priesthood, and that mercy was not to be obtained without costly sacrifices. He therefore abandoned to them both the income tax and the author of it. Machault was deprived of the office of comptroller-general, and transferred to that of minister of the marine, where he served during three years, and was at length dismissed by Madame de Pompadour, whose attempts to render his official powers subservient to her own unworthy purposes, he had had the courage to resist.

The Seven Years' War was now raging. As in all her preceding conflicts with coalitions of the states of Europe, so in this, France had to sustain the pressure of every impost which necessity prescribed, despite all the reclamations of political economy. Thus the *taille* and the capitation tax were increased, the income tax was doubled, the *octroi*, the rates of postage, and the duties on tobacco were augmented. Public offices were sold

in reversion. Useless offices were created with a view to the sale of them. Large parts of the Royal Domain were alienated; and the national debt, funded and unfunded, was enlarged on the most disadvantageous terms. Notwithstanding all these sacrifices, it was however found, before the close of the third year of the war, that the annual deficit exceeded two hundred and seventeen millions, and that the produce of the revenue was incapable of increase by any additional taxation.

Such was the exigency in which Silhouette was called to the office of comptroller-general. Just three years before that event the farmers-general of France had purchased the leases of the revenues collected by them, for large sums of money payable either in advance or annually. By a royal edict Silhouette deprived them of one half of their future receipts, but left them responsible for all their promised payments. I conjecture — for I am aware of no proof of the fact — that they had wrung from the distresses of the state such bargains as to give to this spoliation the semblance of a rude though vindictive justice. It is at least clear that the sufferers were not sustained by any popular sympathy, and that the comptroller-general was able (one can scarcely understand how he was able) to raise seventy-two millions by selling over again the farms, the former sales of which had been thus unceremoniously set aside.

Silhouette next attempted to impose duties, which, like our own assessed taxes, were to fall upon the employment of such persons and the use of such things as indicate the possession of more than average wealth; as, for example, on male domestic servants, on carriages, horses, and the like. A confederacy of the court ladies, and of the parliaments, defeated this measure. The distracted financier then resorted to what was in effect a national bankruptcy — the non-payment, that is, of more than a small dividend, to the national creditors in satisfaction of their annual claims on the treasury. In the vain hope of mitigating the universal

resentment for such injustice to individuals and for such a humiliation to the state, the king and many of his courtiers sent large quantities of plate, of most costly and exquisite workmanship, to the public mint, there to be melted down into louis-d'ors and livres.

These financial miseries were the fitting introduction to the overthrow of Silhouette himself. Yet the reproach of them ought to have fallen far less on him than on the sovereign whom it was his ill fortune to serve. During all the reverses and the shame of the Seven Years' War, Louis XV. was daily drawing from the treasury large sums to defray the waste of his gaming-table and of his other self-indulgences; and the sums issued upon acquits du comptant — those royal orders, that is, of which no account was rendered or audit made — were so vast that, in the single year 1759, they are said to have amounted to the almost incredible sum of one hundred and seventeen millions. Boundless as was the extravagance of Louis XV., and of the dissolute men and women who surrounded him, such an expenditure of secret service money cannot have been wholly incurred for objects so scandalous as these.

The peace of 1763 came at length to rescue France from the ruinous waste of her resources. But even peace did not bring the expected reduction of the public burthens. They were, to a great extent, maintained in consequence of the series of controversies in which the parliaments afterwards engaged with Louis XV., and with Maupeou his chancellor. During those contests the comptroller-generalship devolved on the Abbé Terray, and by him it was retained till the accession of Louis XVI.

Terray seceded in 1769 to an honest man, whose name, D'Invaux, is now almost wholly forgotten, or is remembered only by the following brief summary of the state of his department which he left behind him there after his very brief tenure of it. "It would require," he said, "fifty



millions to raise the annual income to the level of the annual expenditure. At this moment there is payable a debt of nearly eighty millions, which it is scarcely possible to postpone. The entire income of the approaching year has been anticipated. All the operations of the Treasury are accomplished on credit, and credit is sustained on whatever terms, good or bad, are to be had, and we are threatened every instant with the total failure of it on any terms."

It was by such credits that Terray found the Treasury supported, and by such credits he continued to support it, — a desperate and a short-sighted game, indeed, but yet a game not altogether deficient in address and skill, if the interests of the passing day and of the existing administration alone were to be considered. Terray made not a few powerful friends by the very necessity in which he was placed of entering into improvident contracts. In a country of such immense inherent resources as have ever been those of France, a government of such almost unlimited power as hers could never really fail to obtain funds on credit so long as the borrowers were heedless of the terms on which their contracts were made. Many a banker, stock-jobber, and capitalist, resorted to the comptroller-general with schemes for supplying his wants, and left him applauding the wisdom with which he had accepted their proposals. Such praise and gratitude as the Stock Exchange has to bestow, is at the command of any financier who possesses the gift of pliability.

But Terray aimed at the applause not only of those who profited by the public distress, but of those whom it impoverished and overwhelmed. To equalise the national income and expenditure, was the great problem which, since the accession of the Bourbons, Sully and Colbert alone had hitherto been able to solve, and Terray also aspired to find the solution of it. He had but two things to do, the one to increase the receipts, the other to diminish the outgoings

of the royal treasury. What more easy! To increase the receipts, the rate of all existing taxes should be augmented — to diminish the outgoings, the existing liabilities of the Crown should be reduced. The whole fiscal science was compressed into a solitary sentence.

Yet it is hard to travel along any of the royal roads to knowledge. Thus, for example, when Terray would improve the revenue on salt by charging an addition of four sous on each pound weight of that commodity, he did not really gain one sous by that addition. For while in some provinces the previous rate of duty was so low that the additional impost could be borne, in others it was so high, that the smuggler was already more than a match for the fair trader, and every increase of the fair trader's burden was, of course, but so much added to the smuggler's gains. The truth that, in political arithmetic, two and two do not always make four, had not as yet become proverbial.

But if Terray failed in improving the ways and means at his disposal, he was more successful in diminishing the expenditure. It required nothing but audacity. He promulgated edicts reducing the rate of interest on a large part of the national debt. But not even the injustice with which he plundered all the national creditors was impartial. He deprived annuitants for life of a larger share of their income than annuitants in perpetuity. He took away from the creditors of the government on tontine more than from the creditors for life. He deprived the holders of small pensions of a larger share of their incomes than the holders of large pensions, because he feared the reproaches of the one, and was heedless of the resentment of the other.

But Terray failed to accomplish the end which had been reached by Sully and Colbert. When he left the Treasury there was still a deficit, estimated by

himself at twenty-seven millions per annum, by Calonne at forty millions, and by Bailly, one of the financial historians of those times, at forty-one millions. And while he thus impoverished the nation and plundered the poor, his indulgence to the licentious, or at least to the secret, expenditure of the king, went beyond all bounds and all example. The funds withdrawn from all public account and audit by Louis XV., during a single year of Terray's administration, are said to have amounted to one hundred and eighty millions.

To him also is due the encouragement, though not the commencement, of the practice, to which Louis XV. degraded himself, of employing part of the funds thus withdrawn from the treasury in purchasing on his own account large stores of grain, to be afterwards sold for his personal and private advantage. To Terray also belongs the further reproach of having forbidden the exportation of grain from certain provinces to others, in order that the royal corn merchant might have a more advantageous market for his goods stored in those provinces into which he had thus prohibited the introduction of supplies.

These are, I am aware, repulsive details. But they will be disregarded by no one who is really desirous to understand what was that condition of society in France which immediately preceded, and in that sense occasioned, the Revolution. Terray's ministry induced extreme distress by rendering the public imposts at once more oppressive and less productive; by ruining a multitude of helpless families; and by interdicting a free sale and purchase of the first necessary of human life. But it was productive of other and more permanent evils. It had a less obvious, though not less fatal operation in extinguishing those remains of the old constitutional liberties of France, which, even towards the close of the 18th century, were still cherished there, and which under wiser culture might have become the germs of a national

constitution, in which the present, the past, and the future might have been indissolubly united together in one congruous whole.

The kingdom, as I had formerly occasion to explain, was composed of provinces of which some were called Pays d'Etat, and others Pays d'Election. The Pays d'Etat, lived to a certain extent under the government, or at least under the protection, of the old Provincial States, that is, of representatives of the Clergy, the Noblesse, and the Commons ; and although the representation was almost illusory, yet the states of the province granted all subsidies to the Crown, apportioned the charge among their constituents, and superintended the outlay of so much of each grant as was expended within the province itself. No doubt that, to a great extent, all this was an illusion also. Before the states met, the sum to be granted was determined between the governor or intendant on behalf of the Crown, and by some leading members of the states on behalf of the provincials ; and any refusal of the demand would have been followed by an authoritative interference to which no effective opposition could have been made. But still the forms of liberty were employed, the language of liberty was heard, and the spirit of liberty was in some measure kept alive. But in the Pays d'Election the spirit, and, with one exception, the forms and the language also, of liberty were unknown. They had been called by that name, because the inhabitants. *elected* officers called Élus to apportion the common burthen of the whole province among the various parishes comprised in it. But Terray overthrew this solitary franchise or semblance of freedom. He first assumed the right to appoint the Élus ; he then sold the office ; he then deprived the Élus of their powers ; and finally he transferred the exercise of them all to the intendants. From every quarter he received complaints of their unequal and unjust distribution of the public taxes in

the Pays d'Election, and of their misconduct in the Pays d'Etat. The sufferers having appealed to the intendant without effect, appealed from him to the comptroller-general. Terray answered by directing that in future such complaints should be addressed not to himself, but to the Conseil d'Etat. The result was to deprive the harassed people of every prospect of redress. For between the intendant and the Conseil d'Etat a good understanding was readily maintained, and the decisions of that body required no vindication, could be encountered by no remonstrance, and reversed by no appeal. Under the shelter of that imposing name, the intendant and the comptroller-general acquired an absolute financial dominion throughout France, reducing to a shadow or a form the liberties of the Pays d'Etat, and depriving the Pays d'Election even of the form and shadow of liberty.

France, if well and wisely governed during the 18th century, might at the close of it have become the supreme arbiter of the affairs of the civilised world; but throughout that century her rulers acted as though their object had been to provoke the contempt and indignation of their subjects and of mankind at large. The reports of her finance ministers, beginning with the *Etat de la France* of Boulainvilliers, and ending with the *Compte rendu* of Necker, exhibit the continuance, during a hundred years, of one unbroken series of oppressive, injudicious, and unequal imposts, sometimes pressing severely on all orders in the state, but always pressing with undue severity on the poor and helpless classes. The history of those times is a protracted exhibition of the degradation of the Crown, and among its most prominent figures are the Regent outraging all the decencies of life, — Dubois and his other associates rivalling their master, — and Louis XV. slumbering in a kind of oriental seraglio, — contrasted with millions of other figures toiling in want and nakedness to minister to the appe-

tites of their rulers depraved by long habits of unrestrained gratification of every inordinate desire. It is the portraiture of a great nation crushed by every tax which fiscal ingenuity could invent; humbled in all their foreign wars; and ruined in their agriculture and their commerce. Here is a monarch reigning in absolute dominion by the ministry of profligate women; and there a mighty people deprived of every security for their public franchises, their proprietary rights, and their personal freedom.

To say that the overthrow of such a system was the capricious decree of a blind fatality, is a folly so egregious that nothing less than a voluntary blindness and self-infatuation can account for such teaching by men of eminent genius, or for the acceptance of it by their disciples in France. I doubt whether any law of the physical world is more clearly established by experience than is the law which dooms to irremediable ruin any government which wilfully, recklessly, and habitually violates all the high trusts confided to it. But of all possible modes of misgovernment, the most offensive to the sufferers is the tyranny of the fisc. The guilt of rulers who heedlessly engage in war, may be cast into oblivion by the animating vicissitudes of the contest. The encroachments of a monarch on the franchises of his subjects, will often assume a dazzling semblance of energy and force of will. The scaffold may be dyed with the blood of the noblest and the best, without much exciting the sympathy or provoking the resentment of the humbler multitude. But the wounds inflicted by the unjust demands of the tax-gatherer rankle in the bosoms of every class of society, the most abject and the most ignorant hardly excepted. They fall, however, chiefly on that class by whom popular opinion is moulded, and guided, and expressed, — on those who subsist by calling the success of which more or less depends on practical skill and mental culture, and among them pre-eminently on such as are

engaged either in commerce or in the cultivation of the soil on their own account. To them, and, through them, to the whole people, every inequitable tax is a lesson of discontent. If it be not merely unjust in its exactions but partial also in its exemptions, it further teaches the contributors to detach themselves from each other, and especially from the favoured ranks of society, and to break up into irreparable schisms. If the partiality be such as to convict the lawgiver of sympathising with the rich and great, and of a contemptuous indifference to the sufferings of the poor and lowly, such imposts become the sure heralds of a widespread disaffection. If they proceed from a single potentate, unaided by the assent, express or implied, of the people at large, his dynasty is doomed eventually, but irrevocably, to expiate the offence. In France this expiation, though continually approaching, was long retarded. From the days of Richelieu to those of Necker, the absolute king had despoiled his subjects by unequal taxation and by enormous waste. Wars sometimes successful and sometimes disastrous, but always profoundly interesting, at one time reconciled the people to such injustice, and at another compelled the sovereign to redress it, in part, by imposing heavy burdens on the privileged orders. At another period the government, for a while, transferred the odium from themselves to the jobbers and speculators, who, under the direction of Law, converted the whole financial administration of France into a system of gigantic gambling. But then arose the mockers and the jesters; the satirists, now playful, and now indignant; and the doctors, political and economical, giving a new force, a definite purpose, and a widespread diffusion to the resentments and jealousies of the two preceding centuries. And when at length the Capetien dynasty seemed to fall beneath the weight of its financial embarrassments, it was not the fact, as is now clearly demonstrated, that there existed any irremedi-

able deficiency. The truth rather was, that there had been growing up, from generation to generation, a bitter sense of the injustice, the partiality, and the hardheartedness of the financial government of the kingdom,—a vindictive resentment which nothing could satisfy except the overthrow of the throne under the shelter of which those protracted and intolerable wrongs had been perpetrated.



## LECTURE XXV.

ON THE ABSOLUTE MONARCHY AS ADMINISTERED BY  
LOUIS XIV. IN PERSON.

ON the death of Mazarin, Louis XIV. had announced that he would be his own chief minister. On the death of Louvois in 1691, that boast was, for the first time, completely verified. Better had it been for France if he had continued to the last in a real, though in a disguised pupillage. He was admirably qualified to sustain the character of a king, and no less eminently unfit to discharge the more arduous office of an administrator.

Of all the external advantages which best become a monarch, both nature and fortune were bountiful, if not rather prodigal to Louis. It was well said, that if the word "majesty" had never been in use before, it must have been invented to characterise him. His person was stately and of exquisite proportions. The consciousness of supreme authority, tempered by a generous respect towards even the meanest of his associates, gave to his countenance a noble expression, to which each of his finely-sculptured features contributed its share. In all his gestures the sense of high dignity was animated and

controlled by a graciousness which captivated every one who approached him, and by an elegance which seemed instinctive in his nature. His courtesy to all men, and still more to all women, was that of a *preux chevalier*. His familiar conversation was grave but engaging, replete with curious anecdotes, and abounding in reflections well weighed if not profound, and unborrowed if not original. His more sustained elocution flowed with facility and copiousness; and if no man exacted so large a tribute of applause, none possessed in greater perfection the talent of bestowing praise which went straight to the heart, and settled there.

I doubt whether any human being ever enjoyed, in greater perfection, the blessing of nerves toned to habitual energy, and exempt from all morbid sensitiveness. Heat, cold, pain, fatigue, and hunger, seemed to have no power over him. Not only his delicate courtiers but his hardy veterans admired the stoicism of their invulnerable king; and his mental composure was on a level with his bodily hardihood. No provocation could excite him to unseemly anger, and no calamity could depress him to unmanly dejection. If he was often the victim, he was never the slave, of appetite or passion. Though constantly exposed to the allurements of the most exquisite flattery, and of the most fascinating caresses, he never yielded himself to the guidance of any favourite, male or female; but adhered, with immutable constancy and calmness, to the ministers whom he had either trained or chosen.

This unshaken equilibrium of mind, and firmness of bodily constitution, enabled Louis to maintain a continuity of mental labour, an exact method in business, and a consistency of purpose, which imparted a certain dramatic unity of action to the whole of his long career. Under all vicissitudes of good and evil fortune, he lived for the single purpose of enlarging and consolidating the powers of his crown.

Louis was a self-worshipper; but to maintain that worship he carefully cherished in his bosom, and practised in his private relations, the virtues which he most highly respected; such as truth, honour, courtesy, courage, and fidelity to his promises; except, indeed, the promise which he made on his espousals. It was his evil fortune to be the object of a yet more intoxicating worship from the illustrious authors by whom he was surrounded, but it was also his wisdom to make a skilful use even of that disadvantage. He appreciated, extolled, and, not seldom, rewarded, their genius; and earned in exaggerated, but yet immortal, praises, a recompense such as a thousand fold the same expenditure of money or of labour in any other direction could not have purchased for him. Yet, if it be indeed true, as some modern French writers maintain, that the great dramatists of his age at once represented and apologised for the disorderly passions of the enamoured king, in the mimic heroes whom they had sent to tread the stage before him, well indeed had it been both for him and for them if they had substituted their keenest shafts of satire for the most seductive and eloquent of those dishonest eulogies.

I do not think that either the writings of Louis, or the histories or memoirs of his reign, justify any high estimate of his intellectual powers. He had, indeed, in perfection, some of the talents of a mere man of business. He could sustain the weight of any number of details, however intricate or tedious; and, within a range of ideas neither very comprehensive nor very profound, was perspicacious, accurate, and persevering. But there is no proof, nor, indeed, any considerable suggestion, that he was skilful in the practical science of government, or well instructed in any of the moral sciences which are tributary to it.

His memory is, however, enshrined in Voltaire's "*Siècle de Louis Quatorze*." The king and his great eulogist seem to have been born for the express purpose of bear-

ing to each other the relation of hero and historian; so complete and so harmonious was the correspondence between the dramatic majesty of the Grand Monarque of Versailles and the dramatic imagination of the philosopher of Ferney. Nature had lavished on the emperor of France all the gifts, and Fortune all the felicities, which the dictator of the republic of letters could best appreciate and pourtray. The dominion of either potentate has now, indeed, passed away; but the book to which this alliance between them gave birth must ever remain an inimitable monument to the greatness both of the idol and the idolater. Nor, indeed, is any one likely to hazard such an imitation. We have as little prospect of seeing a new *Siècle de Louis Quatorze*, as a new tragedy on the story of *Zaire*. It is a trophy to the fame of Louis which no meaner hand can either embellish or subvert. But while it, protects his memory against all injurious assaults, it may, for that very reason impart freedom to the attempt to estimate rightly, even though it be unfavourably, his real character as the personal administrator of the government of France.

It is, indeed, an attempt which has been made so often, and by authors of so much eminence, that, unless by sacrificing truth to novelty, I believe it to be impossible to offer anything on the subject which would not be, in substance, a repetition of what has been said, and well said, before. The pencil and the chisel did not multiply representations of the bodily form and features of Louis during his lifetime, more frequently than the pen has delineated his character since his death. The histories and the memoirs of his reign may be said to emulate the number and the gigantic proportions of those royal edifices by which it was illustrated; and all that remains to any one who would now pronounce a just judgment on the conduct of the great king himself, is to follow the best of the innumerable guides who present themselves to his

notice. I, therefore, have selected M. Lemontey as my chief authority, believing, as I do, that his essay, "*Sur l'Etablissement Monarchique de Louis XIV.*," is at once the most complete and the most compendious of the various summaries which have been published of the facts to which I shall have occasion to refer as the basis of the conclusions which are to follow.

Louis, himself, indeed, has been drawn by his own hand more distinctly, if less powerfully, than by M. Lemontey, or than by Voltaire himself. Though an illiterate man, he was a diligent writer, and his collected works fill six octavo volumes. In the first and second of them will be found his *Mémoires Historiques*, addressed to the Dauphin, and containing a series of instructions for his guidance whenever he should be called to wear the crown of France. The following extracts from them will explain what was his estimate of his own kingly duties and prerogatives; though it should be observed that these isolated passages are detached from a context which is generally honourable both to the character and the understanding of their royal author; and that his naked theory of despotism is really propounded in his memoirs, not idly or ostentatiously, but in order to enforce upon his destined successor those sacred duties, which he judged to be inseparable from the possession of such absolute authority.

"It is," writes the royal interpreter of the science of government, "the will of Heaven, who has given kings to man, that they should be revered as his vicegerents, he having reserved to himself alone the right to scrutinise their conduct." "It is the will of God that every subject should yield to his sovereign an implicit obedience." "The worst calamity which can befall any one of our rank is to be reduced to that subjection in which the monarch is obliged to receive the law from his people." "It is the essential vice of the English monarchy, that the king can make no extraordinary levies of men or money without

the consent of the parliament, nor convene the parliament without impairing his own authority." "All property within our realm belongs to us in virtue of the same title. The funds actually deposited in our treasury, the funds in the hand of revenue officers, and the funds which we allow our people to employ in their various occupations, are all equally subject to our control." "Be assured that kings are absolute lords, who may fully and freely dispose of all the property in the possession either of churchmen or of laymen, though they are bound always to employ it as faithful stewards." "Since the lives of his subjects belong to the prince, he is obliged to be solicitous for the preservation of them." "The first basis of all other reforms was the rendering my own will properly absolute." Such, in his more contemplative moods, was his view of his own kingly powers. In his colloquial moments the same doctrines were more pithily compressed into his celebrated aphorism, "*L'Etat c'est moi.*"

It was at the date of the Treaty of Nimeguen, of August, 1678, that this aristocratic theory had received the most complete practical development; for, at that time, the dominion of Louis was elevated to its greatest height, and was resting upon its most secure foundation. What, then, were those elements of power in reliance on which he so confidently maintained those doctrines, in his own person, and so unambiguously inculcated them on the heir-apparent of his crown?

First, then, his lofty conception of his own regal state was sustained by the command of a regular army, such as the European world had never before seen since the days of Charlemagne, or perhaps of the Antonines. The veterans who had grown up during his minority in the lawless wars of the Fronde had been silently, but rapidly disbanded; and their ranks had been filled by boys, trained up from their youth in a strict and salutary discipline. Boileau, after attending a review of that young army, said with

equal truth and humour, "elle sera fort bonne quand elle sera majeure:" and so it happened. They were carefully instructed in all the manœuvres and military arts which Gustavus Adolphus had introduced into modern warfare. From what I formerly stated respecting the organisation and government of the French army, you will have learnt that these were the first French troops who were clothed, armed, and accoutred uniformly and according to fixed regulations. They were recruited by royal officers, and not, as formerly, by the governors of the different provinces. By the king himself, and no longer by those governors, all commissions were granted, and all promotions made among them. The ordnance, the engineers, the commissariat, and all the other military departments had now received that regular organisation to which I have already referred. The offices of constable, high admiral, lieutenant general of France, and all the other high dignities which conferred on the holders of them a great and indefinite authority, both over the troops and in the civil government, were suppressed; and the soldier's ambition was limited to warlike distinctions, and, as the most elevated of them all, to the rank of *Maréchal de France*. It was in this service that Condé, Turenne, and Luxembourg had risen to the highest glory. Vauban had created the science of fortification. Louvois had administered, with unrivalled energy, the financial concerns, and the internal economy, of the forces which those great generals had conducted in the field. Honours freely and judiciously bestowed stimulated the ardour of those who were able to bear arms; and the *Hôtel des Invalides*, the most superb of all the edifices dedicated to the civil or military service in France, was constructed for the solace of the veterans. And thus, in the course of a few years, was called into existence the most formidable of European armies. It was trained to exact obedience, governed with perfect order, and paid with punctilious regularity. It exulted in

its own achievements, and gloried in the reputation of its chiefs. But, above all, it was enthusiastically devoted to the king. At their head he had more than once, in the sieges of fortified towns, claimed for himself the post of honour and of danger, and he had not seldom accompanied and commanded them in the camp. In his name every trophy was won. By him every substantial recompense was awarded; and by him, also, the honours of war were conferred with a majesty, a cordiality, and a grace, which immeasurably enhanced their value.

By these methods, or by such as these, Louis had acquired that great first instrument of all arbitrary power—a soldiery who had ceased to be citizens—who regarded the military service as the only path to wealth and eminence—and who sought renown by cultivating the favour, not of their fellow-subjects, but of their sovereign alone. The legionaries of the king of France were, at the same time, his prætorians; and to that irresistible armament the people in France had been brought into a willing, or rather an ostentatious, subjection.

For it was not embodied for the encounter with foreign enemies alone. It was the effective instrument of the royal will in every branch of the civil government. Soldiers were ever at hand to enforce the payment of public taxes. Soldiers were ever ready to compel obedience to the orders of the executive authority. Soldiers were employed, even as missionaries, to inculcate obedience to the spiritual dominion of Rome, by executing those dragonnades which brought, into every Protestant dwelling, every scourge which bigotry, licentiousness, and rapacity could inflict upon the wretched inhabitants.

The civil government also of France, under Louis XIV., acquired a concentration and an energy like that of some vast encampment. Eventually it became no empty boast, that he would be himself his own chief minister. After the death of Colbert and of Louvois, the other



functionaries of the state were not merely his inferiors or his servants, but were, in the proper sense of the word, his subordinates also. France was subject to his single will. The States General were extinct. The Provincial States had ceased to meet. The Parliaments were silent and submissive. Taxes were imposed by royal edicts, in whatever form and to whatever amount seemed fit to the great autocrat, and were levied, without opposition, from his subjects. Throughout the provinces, the ancient administrators of the local government had given place to the intendants, who, originally appointed by Richelieu, had become the immediate delegates, in every part of the kingdom, of the vast prerogatives of the Crown.

The existing centralisation of power in France is as ancient as the days of Louis XIV. ; and his introduction of it is still applauded by some even of those who, in the present times, have the most eloquently arraigned his despotism. They draw an impressive and a just comparison between the regularity, the method, and the efficiency of his system of internal rule, and the violence, the frauds, and the extravagance of the earlier system for which it was substituted; and it must be admitted that if his people were really reduced by some inevitable necessity to the choice between the disorders of a dispersed and incoherent administration on the one hand, and the tyranny of a centralised government on the other, he chose for them the lighter evil of the two. But of the real existence of any such necessity, I am not aware that any proof has been, or could be given.

To secure to that central power its characteristic decision and promptitude, Louis further became the founder of the police which has ever since exercised so great an influence in France. The chief objects of that institution were, indeed, the prevention of crime and the maintenance of the public peace, but it was also designed to secure the royal authority against all secret conspiracies and intrigues;

and with that view it was supported by a systematic espionage, and became a vast net, of which the minister of police held the strings, and which enclosed almost every member of society within its invisible meshes. D'Argenson was the Fouché of the 17th century.

The absolute powers of Louis XIV. were sustained by the ecclesiastical not less than by the military and civil orders of his subjects. In virtue of the Concordat of August, 1516, between Francis I. and Leo X., the king of France had become the patron of all episcopal sees, of all royal abbeys, and of many parochial benefices. By the skilful use of that patronage Louis XIV. was enabled to attach to his service and person every considerable family in his kingdom. Sometimes he bestowed the cure of souls upon laymen, in commendam. Sometimes he charged the revenues of particular churches with pensions for the support of his favourites. The abbeys became the appanages of noble lords, or of noble ladies. The mitres were almost invariably bestowed on men of high birth, but of mean fortunes. The temporalities of the Church were thus employed for the corruption of the world. The single mitigation of the evil was, that the sacerdotal aristocracy was composed of men whose hereditary rank secured for them a liberal education, elegant manners, and at least decorous lives. If, in the reign of Louis XIV., the mitre in the Gallican Church adorned the brows of no candidates for canonisation, it was at least very rarely disgraced by the scandalous lives, or open immoralities, of those who wore it. Nor were the French bishops much, or often, involved in the cabals of worldly ambition. After the death of Mazarin, Louis XIV. entrusted no churchman with any considerable authority in the state; and though he confided the education of the Dauphin to Bossuet and to Fénelon, he did not invite, and would not have permitted, even these illustrious men to exert their genius and eloquence beyond the appropriate sphere of their sacred functions.

The nobility of France also were constrained to minister to the elevation of their sovereign, by a virtual abdication of their own. The ancient feudal chiefs had, indeed, long since disappeared, but the later Noblesse, of which Charles V. and Louis XI. were the founders, had, even from its origin, been subject to great indignities. Louis XI. ennobled not only the municipal officers of the great cities, but his own menial servant. Charles VIII., to the consternation of his age, granted the same honour to a bastard. Charles IX. sold patents of nobility by twenties and thirties at a time. Henry III. created 1000 new nobles in the single year, 1576; and, at last, a multitude of persons assumed the same rank by a mere lawless usurpation. Louis XIV. was the first to declare against the Noblesse and their privileges, that war which was at last to be triumphant in the Revolution. He instituted a severe inquiry into the validity of their pretensions to that rank, and persevered in it without regard to the bitter humiliations to which it subjected many of the claimants of hereditary titles. He selected all the principal ministers of his crown from plebeian families; and, to induce the poor nobility to seek their maintenance by commercial pursuits, he published an edict, declaring that such occupations should derogate nothing from their rank and station in society. The exhortation and the indulgence were alike indignantly rejected, and the words *Chevalier d'Industrie*, then first introduced into the French tongue, are said to be the record of the preference which many of those high-born persons gave to a descent into the high road with vizors and pistols, over a descent into the counting-house with pens and rulers. Their number was enormous, amounting, it is computed, to not less than 30,000 families. To deliver himself from that hungry and rapacious swarm, became one of the most serious embarrassments of the king. After largely increasing the establishment of offi-

cers in the army for their relief, he at length embodied whole corps, composed exclusively of these indigent gentlemen. The result was, to place himself at the head of the most costly, irascible, intrepid, and intelligent force in Europe. But it was a school in which the proudest learnt the great lesson of obedience. For even when not under arms, the most ancient and illustrious duke was compelled to yield precedence to the youngest *maréchal de France*.

While the necessitous aristocracy were thus tamed in the camp, or destroyed in the field of battle, the more affluent were attracted to the court by other motives. Thither came the rural lords from Auvergne, or Bretagne, or Provence; for, to withhold that homage, was to provoke the royal displeasure and the ridicule of society. Thither came also the noble aspirants after honours, preferment, pleasure, or fashion; for of these the court was the seat and centre. There they sacrificed their independence, and squandered their resources, in dress, and equipages, and gallantry, and gaming; and there they repaired those losses by the acceptance of royal gratuities, bestowed on them in every form the best calculated to mortify the pride of rank, and to wound all honest feelings of self-respect. And there also Louis, the most accomplished of gentlemen, habitually exacted and received, from the noblest of his realm, adulations and menial services better becoming the palace of Ispahan than the *château of Versailles*. The individual nobles who, in the reign of Louis XIII., had aspired to a competition with the royal authority, had been crushed by the iron hand of Richelieu. Their order itself was degraded by the fourteenth Louis into a band of mercenary soldiers, or of servile courtiers.

The magistracy also was rendered tributary to his absolute power. The Parliaments had, to no inconsiderable extent, succeeded to the authority of the States

General; and under the shelter of legal forms exercised, at least, a suspensive veto on all royal ordinances, and, especially, on all fiscal edicts. Destitute as they were of all material force, they had long possessed a moral power, to which the power of the sword rendered a reluctant and almost unconscious obeisance; and the brightest page of French history is that which records the courage, the disinterestedness, and the learning of that company of pedantic lawyers. But from his boyhood Louis had been taught to regard them with antipathy and contempt. He was but seventeen years old when, entering that venerable assembly booted and spurred, and (it is usually added) insolently brandishing his riding-whip, he dissolved their meeting, forbade them ever again to prefer any remonstrance to him, and commanded them to confine themselves strictly within the limits of their judicial office; nor, during the remainder of his long reign, did he once condescend to solicit or to accept their advice. Excluded from their political functions, they found, in the assiduous discharge of their duties as judges, a shelter from indignities and danger; and, ceasing to be the antagonists of the king, they became the instruments of his absolute dominion. Before their tribunal he could humble the proudest *grande*s of France. By their concurrence he could impart a seeming legality to his taxation; and, by their agency, he was able to carry into execution all the severe and formidable provisions of his penal code of 1670. A more convenient bulwark could, indeed, hardly have been interposed between an arbitrary throne and the discontents of the people; for, existing as they did, not by popular representation, but by the appointment of the Crown, the public indignation could always be readily directed against them, while they were altogether dependent on the sovereign for support against it.

The *Tiers Etat*, or Commons of France, were, at this

time, in a state of abject insignificance and political impotency. They bore nearly the whole burden of direct taxation, they performed the *corvées*, or personal services on the public roads, and they lived under all the pressure of the feudal tenures, and of the yet subsisting seigniorial jurisdictions: The incorporated towns alone retained the ancient forms of civic liberty, and the semblance of their ancestral franchises. But these forms and semblances had survived the once living realities. Louis XIV., as we formerly saw, claimed and exercised the right of superseding the elected municipal officers, to make way for officers of his own appointment, and those appointments he disposed of at a kind of public auction. In this manner he put up to sale, in 1681, all the employments at the Hôtel de Ville at Paris; and eleven years later he displaced, in favour of his own nominees, the elected mayors and judicial assessors of every other city in France except Lyons. To enhance the price of the more considerable of these civic offices, he sometimes sold with them hereditary patents of nobility, and sometimes he consented to leave a commune in possession of its electoral franchises, in consideration of the payment of a sum of money sufficient to indemnify him against what he lost by that forbearance. The extent of this abuse will be best illustrated by a single example. It is that of the city of Rennes, where, in the course of fourteen years, the king created and sold nineteen royal offices in the militia of the city, all the seats in the civic tribunals, five employments in the local police, with two in the fiscal and one in the legal departments; nor must it be omitted that, in the list of this royal merchandise, was included an office so humble as that of house porter to the Hôtel de Ville. If Louis the Fat and Louis the Saint are really entitled to the glory of having founded municipal liberty in France, Louis the Great is much more clearly entitled to the reproach of having destroyed it.

In a preceding lecture I adverted to the absolute dependence into which Louis had reduced the men of letters of France. It was a conquest even yet more essential than any of the rest to the maintenance of his personal supremacy. It gave him the greatest of all powers — the power of directing and controlling public opinion. It gave him, as the instruments of that power, an assemblage of writers who, even if inferior in genius to the philosophers, poets, and dramatists who have conferred immortal renown on the ages of Lorenzo and of Elizabeth, were still decidedly their superiors in the gift of forming and captivating the taste of their fellow-countrymen in their own and all succeeding generations. When Boileau was as profuse in panegyric on the king, as in satire on all other men — when Molière who laughed at everybody else worshipped him — when Racine's devotion to his Creator was reconciled with the idolatry of his sovereign — when La Rochefoucauld, in his "indictment against human nature," could find place for encomiums on that one bright exception — when the eloquence of Bossuet could stoop from its loftiest flights to celebrate the virtues of his royal patron — when both the learning of the Benedictines, and the piety of the Port Royalists, rendered a devout homage to the great monarch — and when the casuistry of the Jesuits apologised for his offences — how could it be but that every meaner voice should join in the loud chorus of adulation, which, during more than half a century, never ceased to extol the courage, the wisdom, the genius, and the triumphs of the universal idol? And how could it be but that he who inhaled the fumes of such sacrifices, offered to him by such a priesthood, should yield his better reason to that intoxicating influence, and believe himself to be that miracle of nature which they delineated? I doubt the truth, for I cannot ascertain the authority, of the story, that William III. indignantly repelled the plaudits of the theatre by the

question, "Do the idiots mistake me for the king of France?" But, even if untrue, it is no inapt illustration of the then prevailing opinion of the extent and of the value of the flatteries which Louis was accustomed to receive, and to welcome, from his subjects.

The two foundations of the absolute throne of Louis XIV. were, therefore, terror and admiration: the terror of a power which had subjugated the army, the church, the magistracy, the noblesse, and the municipalities — the admiration of a power to which literature and art, arms and fortune, rendered their richest and their uninterrupted tribute. King-worship had never before taken so entire a possession of any Christian state. Never had the luxurious pomp of an oriental court been so intimately and so long associated with the energies, the refined tastes, and the intellectual culture of an European sovereignty. During fifty successive years, Louis continued to be the greatest actor on the noblest stage, and in the presence of the most enthusiastic audience of the world. At how boundless an expense of toil and treasure that representation was conducted — how it was continued even in the midst of famine and all other national calamities — and how the gorgeous drama of Versailles was relieved by the yet more animating spectacle of military triumphs, or darkened by the gloom of military reverses, — is known to all who have read even the most familiar accounts of the *Siècle de Louis Quatorze*.

To substitute, however, for that general impression a more definite view of the principal results of this absolute dominion, it may be convenient to advert, however briefly, to the consequences of the wars into which Louis plunged — to the character of his diplomatic relations with all other powers — to the calamities induced by his waste of the national resources in maintaining the pomp and luxuries of his court — to the effect of that lavish expenditure on the morals and manners of his age — to the



iniquitous persecutions into which the possession of unrestrained power hurried him—and to the manner in which the abuse of that power contributed to the eventual subversion of his dynasty.

First, then, the wars of Louis with the other powers of Europe were commenced on four different occasions between the death of Mazarin and the Peace of Utrecht, and, on each of those occasions, the French historians themselves being the judges, were unprovoked and unjustifiable. As he thought on that subject, so he wrote. "Self-aggrandisement," he informs his grandson, "is at once the noblest, and the most agreeable, occupation of kings." But he affected rather the glory of a conqueror, than the reputation of a general. He invariably declined a battle in the field with his enemies, apparently because he would not run the risk of compromising his majesty by the indignities of a possible defeat. He not seldom availed himself of any opportunity of undertaking in person the siege of the strongest cities, because, in such enterprises, the genius of Vauban, and of his other engineers, assured him of a rich harvest of renown. But, ere long, he wisely abandoned to his officers the conduct of his forces. His keen sense of ridicule taught him that a king of France could not, in imitation of a Persian sophy, carry with him to the wars his courtiers, and courtezans, and mimes, and cooks, and sideboards, and stage scenery, without provoking from the wits and jesters missiles to which even his artillery could make no effectual answer. He therefore withdrew from the camp the luxuries of his court, but not without drawing to his court much of the licentiousness of the camp. A great, though not an intolerable, evil; but the evil of his habitually maintaining those vast encampments was such as could be endured neither by his neighbours, nor by his people. It is with hesitation, because it is with a full knowledge how great are the fallacies to which statistics so often give shelter, that I transcribe the com-

mon estimate of the number and the cost of his great armaments. It represents the standing army of Louis as having amounted to 400,000 men under arms, or, as I rather understand the statement, on the muster rolls; and it assures us that, for the support of the ten campaigns of the war of 1688, the French treasury disbursed between forty and forty-one millions of pounds sterling, and between eighty-one and eighty-two millions of the same money on account of the twelve campaigns of the war of 1701. Prodigious as such a waste of treasure may seem, well had it been for mankind if that waste had been the most calamitous result of those campaigns; but, to the disgrace of our common Christianity, and of our common nature, History has a far darker tale to tell, of the utter ruin and desolation, by the armies of France, of the defenceless cities of Spire, Worms, and Oppenheim, of all the territories of Treves and Baden, and of all the towns, villages, and hamlets of the Palatinate, and of the unarmed inhabitants of those once smiling regions—crimes which, as they were wantonly perpetrated in cold blood, and by one Christian and civilised people upon another, threw into the shade the worst ravages of Attila or Genseric, and almost challenged a comparison with the atrocities of the day of St. Bartholomew.

Nor was the character of the diplomatic relations of Louis XIV. with other powers more defensible. In his pursuit of that “noblest and most agreeable occupation of kings—self-aggrandisement,” he not only violated every law of nations, and of humanity, in his warfare with his enemies, but was deliberately, and on principle, regardless of the obligations of good faith towards his allies. “In dispensing with the exact observance of treaties (such is the language of his instructions to the Dauphin) we do not,” he says, “violate them; for the language of such instruments is never to be understood literally. We must employ, in our treaties, a conventional phraseology, just as we use

complimentary expressions in society. They are indispensable to our intercourse with one another, but they always mean much less than they say." — "The more unusual, circumspect, and reiterated were the clauses by which the Spaniards excluded me from assisting Portugal, the more evident it is that the Spaniards did not believe that I should really withhold such assistance."

Machiavelli never taught a more dissolute doctrine, nor Escobar a more convenient sophistry; nor did Molière ever ascribe to his Mascarilles a greater proficiency in imposture, than Louis XIV. thus openly avows and attributes to himself. Nor did he write thus to amuse himself with a barren theory, or a pleasant exaggeration. He actually rendered to Portugal the aid which he had just engaged to withhold from her. He established a title to the cities of Colmar, Strasbourg, and Casal, by artifices at which Gil Blas de Santillane would have been scandalised. He despoiled the Duchesse de Montpensier of her vast inheritance, by a stratagem better befitting the bachelor of Salamanca than a great king. At the moment he was bribing Charles II. to betray his people, he was also exciting the remnant of the Cromwellians to revolt against Charles. His marriage treaty had scarcely been executed, before he was involved in intrigues to defeat the renunciation of the Spanish inheritance to which that treaty and his own solemn oaths obliged Maria Theresa and himself. To obtain that inheritance he persecuted his father-in-law, Philip IV., to death, and embittered the life and the death of his brother-in-law, Charles II. of Spain. He defrauded the Dutch, the English, the Emperor, and the Empire. Falsehood and faithlessness are stamped on every page of his diplomacy, as published in the reign of his descendant, Louis Philippe.

But neither the deceits, nor the injustice, of Louis XIV. irritated mankind so profoundly as his insolence. His statue, at the feet of which all nations were exhibited crouching

and in chains, represented to the admiring Parisians the haughty spirit of their sovereign, not less distinctly than his noble person. He avenged the slightest shadow of an imaginable wrong by the most galling insults. From such indignities Genoa was not rescued by her weakness, nor Holland by the advantages, political and commercial, of her alliance, nor Rome by the religious veneration rendered to her pontiffs. And therefore, when Philip II. and Louis XIV. had both, at length, been humbled before the same Batavian marshes, the nations of Europe exulted more in the overthrow of the arrogance which had made war with the United Provinces, to punish the discourtesy of a medallist and a gazetteer, than in the defeat of the bigotry which had decimated the Dutch people to establish the Inquisition.

If the immutable laws of God had not decreed that such wars, however successful, should be followed by a fearful rebound of misery against the aggressors, this earth would not be habitable. The French nation never recovered the waste of strength and treasure in the campaigns of their once idolised monarch, until his dynasty and his institutions had been subverted in the same common ruin. To this day they have never effectually recovered the wounds inflicted on their national self-esteem by the humiliations of the war of the Spanish Succession. And yet neither the loss nor the shame incurred by those disastrous conflicts were so deeply injurious to the subjects of Louis, as the calamities induced by his waste of the resources of his people in maintaining the pomp and luxuries of his court, and in other modes of unthrift and profusion.

Among the many conjectural estimates of the sums squandered by him on fêtes, gardens, palaces, gratuities, unmerited pensions, and other prodigalities, it is difficult to make any confident preference. But the highest of them all will scarcely seem incredible to the readers of Dangeau and St. Simon; or to those who contemplate the

sumptuous edifices which still embellish Paris, and Marly, and Versailles; and least of all to those who bear in mind the economical illusions under which he acted.

Those illusions taught him that his extravagance was not only not injurious, but positively beneficial to his subjects. When Madame de Maintenon solicited him to relieve the mendicants who thronged his palace gates, he made what M. Say calls "that precious and terrible answer, which taught how to ruin a nation upon principle." "A large expenditure," he said, "is the almsgiving of kings;" and he gave such alms until France had nearly been reduced to one vast receptacle for paupers.

His fiscal measures, after the death of Colbert, attest the utmost extremity of distress. Of the conduct of those measures, under Le Pelletier, Pontchartrain, and Desmaretz, I have already had occasion to speak, and especially of the "royal tithe," an annual income tax of ten per cent. on all immovable property, imposed, not as Vauban had recommended, in substitution for all other taxes, but in addition to them. The money borrowed on the credit of the revenues thus created, became a national debt, which, when due allowance is made for the value of money in that age, appears stupendous even now, after all our lamentable familiarity with such subjects. I reject, indeed, as an idle extravagance, though I know not how to reduce to the level of truth, the statement that the debt amounted to no less than 200,000,000*l.* sterling. But the acceptance of such an exaggeration by writers not habitually credulous or inaccurate, is itself some proof that the real amount of the burden transmitted by Louis to his descendants, was such as, in the absence of any exact means of knowledge, was best expressed by hyperbole. The more prominent results of this extravagance were perceptible to the contemporary memorialists of the court and times of Louis XIV. Smuggling became a trade in which none were ashamed, and few were afraid, to engage.

Whole bodies of cavalry deserted their ranks to take their share in it. On the northern and eastern frontiers the half-famished garrisons were in revolt. At the beginning, as at the close, of the 18th century, the place d'armes in front of the château of Versailles was thronged with hordes of destitute people clamorous for relief. At length Louis the Magnificent himself was driven by want to Paris, humbly to sue, in person, for loans at an extortionate usury from Samuel Bernard, and the other money-lenders of his capital.

But to those who had eyes to see, and hearts to understand, there were perceptible still more impressive proofs than these, of the calamities in which the prodigality of a king may involve his people. Wanton wars and heartless luxuries had corrupted the moral sense of that voluptuous court. The theatre of Paris, at this day, would not tolerate the tone in which, at that time, the great Molière mocked at conjugal fidelity in comedies written for the theatre at Versailles. The great monarch himself violated that duty openly and ostentatiously. He raised to the line of succession to his crown, the sons borne to him by the wives of other men, while his own wife was still living. That gaming flourished there to the most extravagant excess, we know from the strange avowals of the courtly Dangeau ; but, unaided by the caustic St. Simon, who would have conjectured that, in those splendid halls, a fraudulent gamester could be regarded in the light of an ingenious, pleasant companion ? He tells us of a duke who frequented the royal circle, and who, he says, "was better liked by the king, and had more influence in society, than anybody. He was," proceeds our author, "magnificent in everything and a great gambler, and did not pique himself on fair dealing in his play ; but many other great lords did the same, and only laughed at it." The ladies also, as we learn from the same authority, imitated the example. But the female conscience had, it seems, a pecu-

liar tenderness on the subject of cheating at cards. No lady could think of retaining such unrighteous gains. No sooner had she touched them than she religiously gave them all away. It is, however, to be added, that the gift was always made to some other winner of her own sex. By carefully avoiding the words "interchange of winnings," the fair casuists seem also to have avoided all self-reproach, and to have had an easy escape with their discreet and lenient confessors. In this singular society were young gentlemen also, who relieved the tame formalities of other conversation by admitting to their tables and familiar intercourse notorious criminals, who had animating stories to tell of their own desperate achievements as forgers, or as highwaymen. And young and old were alike engaged in that scandalous traffic in penalties and forfeitures, which Mr. Macaulay has so vividly depicted in his portraiture of the court of James II.

Among the victims of the law in France, there were always to be found several both of the innocent and the rich. To multiply the number of such victims was to open a vein of wealth to many a necessitous sycophant of the court. As the miner of California to some newly discovered digging, or the vulture of those regions to the scent of some recent carcass, so hurried the lords, and the ladies, of Versailles in search of forgotten penalties, or uncollected forfeitures, or obsolete offences, for which the offenders might still be subjected to fines or confiscations. Sometimes the whole of any such game, when hunted down, was thrown by the lavish king to the informers; sometimes he himself participated in the spoil. There were not wanting cases in which even the princesses of his house were enabled, by such resources, to repay the expenditure of the wardrobe and the gaming table. The Duke of Orleans is said to have extracted a million of livres from an officer in charge of the military chest, who had been made over to him to be subjected to the *peine*

*forte et dure* of a judicial process. In this crusade against wealthy criminals, the only persons who were absolutely excluded from any share in the spoil were the destitute kindred, who were to partake of the ruin, though they had not partaken of the guilt, of the offenders.

It is said by M. Lemontey, that it was at this period that the word "honnête" exchanged its primitive for its actual meaning in the French vocabulary; that, till the latter half of the reign of Louis, an "honnête homme" was the name for an upright, not for an inoffensive, man; that, when a man's descent was said to be *honnête*, he was complimented on the virtuousness of his progenitors, not reminded of the mediocrity of their condition; and that, when his family were described as *honnête*, it was an acknowledgment that they belonged to the middle ranks of society, not a suggestion that they were plebeians. If the remark be accurate, it is a curious instance of the connection between philology and history, and of the influence of the French court on the vernacular language of France.

But the most impressive record of the misgovernment of Louis is to be found in those religious persecutions into which he was hurried by the possession of an absolute and irresponsible power. Religion, as inculcated on Louis XIV. by his confessors, is said by M. de Sismondi to have been reducible to two precepts, "Desist from adultery; exterminate heresy." If the king fell short in the first of those duties, he wrought works of supererogation in the second. Yet he did not commence his holy war with the sword, nor did he, in the progress of it, neglect the powerful alliance of the purse.

One third of all the profits of all the vacant benefices of France was set apart by Louis as the capital of a sort of Bank of Conversion, at the head of which he placed Pelisson, himself a convert from the faith of Geneva. Under Pelisson were employed subordinate officers in all



the cities and provinces of France, in which Protestantism most abounded. Their duty was to purchase adhesions to the Church of Rome. For this traffic there was a regular scale of prices, ranging from five to one hundred livres, according to the estimated value of each man's apostacy—an enormous price, indeed, if regard be had to the value of the commodity bought and sold; for at half the money, the rogues and vagabonds of France might, as it should seem, have broken this royal Bank of Faith in a month, and so have kept the ecclesiastical benefices indefinitely vacant. Yet, gazette after gazette published lists of many hundreds of Pelisson's *miraculous* conversions; and if the union of folly, fraud, and impudence, in the highest possible degree, be any departure from the established laws of nature, the term was not ill-bestowed. Such was the religion of him, dissent from whom was about to be followed by the most disgusting, if not the most terrible, of all the persecutions with which the Christian world has been visited!

Pelisson's converts, as he himself says of them, desired to be moistened liberally by the rich dews which it was his genial office to distil. Many of them, therefore, devised the obvious scheme of a relapse, a reconversion, and a new sale of their souls to the royal purchaser. He answered them, however, not by more livres, but by an edict which, in the year 1679, condemned all relapsed persons to banishment for life, and confiscation of all their property. The blow, as we shall hereafter see, reached much further than to the knaves at whom it was aimed.

It was in the preceding year that the Peace of Nimeguen had brought the greatness of Louis to its apogee. Supreme over his own subjects, and over all the powers of Europe, it remained for him to accomplish the strange law or destiny of his race, by submitting his mind to a thralldom from which he should never again be either able or willing to emancipate himself. The chains so indissoluble, because

they were at once so soft and so well concealed, were grasped by the too famous Madame de Maintenon.

During the first sixteen years of her life she had adhered to the religious creed or society of her great-grandfather, Agrippa d'Aubigné, one of the most eminent of the champions and historians of the Huguenots. Even after her elevation, Louis (as we learn from her own letters) would occasionally upbraid her with too fond a remembrance of the heresy of her youth; but ambition, which (as she also informs us) was the master-spirit of her life, rendered her triumphant over all such domestic associations and early remembrances. She even exaggerated, in her own person, the bigotry of her royal patron, and became the willing accomplice of Père la Chaise in provoking him to engage in the great crusade of the 17th century.

In that servile court, obedience to the presiding demi-god was not merely a law but a passion. To win his smile by making proselytes became the daily labour of all the sycophants who thronged it. At each levee, dukes, and peers, and bishops, and generals laid before him their lists of new converts. No post reached Versailles without intelligence of some Protestant church having been demolished, or of the dispersion of some Protestant assembly. If, with such grateful tidings, there also came the news of riots, outrages, and conflagrations, of which the heretics had been the victims, the sovereign, jealous as he was of his power, regarded with seeming indifference, and with at least supposed favour, such violations of the laws of which he was the guardian.

For the law was, even yet, on the side of the dissenters. The Edict of Nantes still remained on the statute book of France. During fourscore years and upwards, 2,000,000 of Frenchmen had regarded it as the charter of their civil and religious liberties; and of the rest, many respected it as the corner-stone of the peace and union of the kingdom. The great founder of the Bourbon dynasty had

consecrated it as the very ark of the constitution, purchased with the toils, the sacrifices, and the bloodshed of his glorious life. It was the one royal ordinance to which the people of the realm had learnt to look with enthusiasm, as an immortal trophy of the valour and wisdom of their ancestors. Even the triumphant Louis, therefore, long hesitated to lay his hand upon such a monument. He could not at once subvert it, but he could, by new legislation, render it ineffectual.

In the succeeding century the statute book of our own country was to be disgraced by a penal code against the Roman Catholics. It was, indeed, prompted by the too well founded fears of our ancestors for the Protestant succession, and for the civil liberties of England. It was, to a considerable extent, a menace only; as, to the last, it remained dormant in many of its worse enactments. But whatever may be the worth of these or of any similar apologies, the English penal code was a great crime and has been righteously and signally punished. So far be the guilt and shame of our fatherland confessed. But when the adherents of the Church of Rome denounce that or any other form of religious persecution as unexampled, one is constrained to ask, whether there be really any limits to human credulity in the acceptance of fiction, or of human incredulity in the rejection of truth? There are, we know, those who regard the story of Julius Cæsar as a myth. Some allow no existence to Mahomet, except as the ideal hero of an Arabian tale. Dr. Whately, as we are all aware, has gone far to annihilate the faith of mankind in the life and adventures of Napoleon Buonaparte. But what are these historical discoveries in comparison with that which requires us to disbelieve the surpassing pre-eminence of the Church of Rome, in every country and in every age, in the mysteries of tormenting heretics in mind, body, and estate! We must be more mythical than Strauss, more sceptical than Whately, if we do not

recognise in her the great original, of whom all other persecutors have ever been but timid, feeble, and most imperfect imitators. Thus, for example, the penal code which grew up amidst the agonies and alarms of our Revolution of 1688, was nothing else than a faint copy of the edicts, which, in the profound tranquillity of the Peace of Nimeguen, were promulgated by Louis XIV., with the aid, and by the advice, of some of the greatest statesmen, lawyers, and divines whom the Catholic Church of France could boast, at the very climax of the literary and ecclesiastical glory of that kingdom.

It provided that no Protestant might hold any public office, political or municipal, or engage in any liberal profession. No Protestant woman might discharge the office of a midwife. No mixed marriages might be contracted. By one provision, all Protestants were forbidden to employ *Catholic* valets, lest the valet should be seduced into heresy. By another they were forbidden to employ *Protestant* valets, because such persons could not be trusted in such a service. No Protestant could be the tutor or guardian of a child, however nearly related to him. All bastards, of whatever age, must be brought up or instructed in the Catholic faith.- Any child of the age of seven years might abjure the Protestant religion, and the parent opposing any such abjuration was to incur the most severe penalties. Converts to the Church of Rome were to enjoy an immunity during three years from all the demands of their creditors, and during two years from all tailles and quarterings of troops; while the treasury was to be indemnified for the loss by doubling those charges upon the contumacious. All the property of all Protestant churches beyond the permitted limits, and such of their property within those limits as was devoted to the maintenance of their poor, was transferred to the Catholic hospitals. No legacy could be bequeathed for the benefit of any consistory. All physicians were required to report the state of their Pro-

testant patients to the magistrates, that domiciliary visits might be made, to obtain, if possible, their abjuration. No sick Protestant might be relieved or attended in any private houses, but, if they had not houses of their own, they were to be conveyed to hospitals under the care of Catholic physicians and divines. And, finally, if any new convert should be admitted into any Protestant congregation, the pastor was to be punished by banishment and confiscation of his goods, the people by the final dispersion of their assembly.

I will not undertake to say that our own Parliament may not afterwards have invented some iniquitous improvements even on this iniquitous series of enactments. They were but too apt pupils in the wicked arts of their Catholic models. But from the very lips of those who gave them the example, the reproach of having followed it is as preposterous as, unhappily, it is just. Bacchanals are not the most appropriate censors of drunkenness, nor do rebukes for impurity come with the happiest effect from the priesthood of Aphrodite.

But Louis and his councillors, lay and ecclesiastical, were soon to advance far beyond the reach of any Protestant imitation. The most powerful of those councillors, after the death of Colbert, were the Chancellor le Tellier and the Marquis de Louvois, his son; to whom must be added, Madame de Maintenon and Père la Chaise. Le Tellier was, at this time, far advanced in life, and cherished, as he was himself accustomed to say, but one last wish. It was, that he might live long enough to affix the great seal of France to a royal ordinance for the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Louvois contemplated the compulsory union of all Frenchmen in the same forms of worship, and in the avowal, at least, of the same faith, in the light in which he contemplated every other subject. Whenever the impending war with the Protestant powers should be actually declared, such an

union would, as he believed, at once deprive them of a formidable alliance within the kingdom, and increase the force and number of the arms by which they might be either resisted, or assailed, abroad. To govern the heart of Louis, and, therefore, to adopt all the maxims by which his confessor governed his conscience, were the very laws of the existence of Madame de Maintenon. Those maxims, as inculcated by La Chaise, might be summed up in the doctrine—that to promote the dominion of the Church of Rome is the one end for which existence has been given to kings, to ministers, to favourites, and to confessors, and to every one within the reach of their authority.

The conduct of all affairs relating to the Protestants fell, at that time, within the department of Châteauneuf de la Vrillière, the minister of the royal household, a man of feeble character, who readily acquiesced in the indirect usurpation by Louvois of some of the most important functions of his office. With that view, in April 1684, the king, on Louvois' advice, promulgated a law exempting all converts, during the two years next immediately after their conversion, from the obligation of affording quarters to the king's troops, and transferring that obligation to the unconverted. The effect of this enactment was to transfer from La Vrillière to Louvois, as minister for war, the entire management of all the relations between the Crown and the Heretics of France. For, since the troops withdrawn from the houses of the new converts were to be domiciled in those of the contumacious, Louvois, and the officers acting under him, became at once the universal and absolute judges of such contumacy, and the punishers of it without appeal. He introduced into the French language a new word, and added to the miseries of the persecuted a new torment. Diocletian might have envied the ingenuity by which the most Christian king invented the *Dragonnades* for the punishment of erring Christians. The motives of his chief adviser, on this occasion, seem indeed

to have been mercenary and vulgar enough. "Louvois," says Madame de Caylus, "finding the kingdom at peace, and fearing that his colleagues in office would eclipse his own importance, was determined, at whatever cost, to employ the sword in a transaction which ought to have been conducted by charity and gentleness alone." Be that imputation on his memory just or otherwise, we know that in 1685, a French army had hastily been drawn together, by an unfounded alarm, to the Spanish frontier, and were then marched into the southern provinces of France as missionaries of the faith of Rome. We have still the instructions of Louvois to the Marquis de Boufflers, their commandant, to quarter them on the Protestants, and to retain them at each house where they might be so lodged until the inhabitants of it should be converted; and then to transfer them for the same purpose to another. "The king," wrote Louvois shortly afterwards to another of his officers, "desires that they who will not adopt his religion should suffer the most extreme rigours, and that such of them as may have the stupid ambition of being the last to yield, should be urged to the last extremities."

What, then, were the methods by which these new missionaries laboured to enlarge the borders of their Church? He who would possess such knowledge must purchase it at a heavy price. He must read Elie Benoît, and the other Huguenot martyrologists of those times, and learn from them what are the woes, and what the degradations, into which fanaticism can plunge the inhabitants of this fair world. Or he may consult the yet surviving witnesses of the last European war, who still whisper things, the publicity of which mankind would not endure, about the habits of a brutal soldiery, when let loose to satiate their evil passions amongst a conquered and helpless population. To the Protestant subjects of Louis XIV. that mystery of iniquity was revealed by those whom he sent among them

in the holiest of all names, and, avowedly at least, for the most sacred of all purposes. A single passage from Bénédict may suggest some of the disclosures which it does not actually make.

"The dragoons," he says, "fixed crosses to their muskets, so as the more readily to compel their hosts to kiss them; and if the kiss was not given, they drove the crosses against their stomachs or their faces. They had as little mercy for the children as for the adult, beating them with those crosses, or with the flat sides of their swords so violently, as not seldom to maim them. The wretches subjected the women also to their barbarities; they whipped them; they disfigured them; they dragged them by the hair through the mud or along the stones. Sometimes they would seize the labourers on the highways, or when following their carts, and drive them to the Catholic churches, pricking them like oxen with their own goads to quicken their pace thither."

If the missionaries themselves may be believed, never was any Christian mission so successful. In one of his reports to his father, the chancellor, Louvois informed him that, in a few weeks, 20,000 conversions had been effected in the Généralité of Montauban, and 60,000 in that of Bourdeaux, where such (he said) was the rapidity of the process, that though so lately as the last month there had been 150,000 Protestants dwelling in that district, there would soon not be as many as 10,000. The Duc de Noailles, commanding the army on the south-east, wrote to Louvois as follows:—"The day after my arrival at Nismes, the most considerable persons of the place made their abjuration. The ardour for change then cooled a little, but, in consequence of my having quartered some troops upon some of the most obstinate, affairs are once more in a good train." . . . "I hope that, before the end of the month, not a single Huguenot will be left in the Cevennes." . . . "The number of these religionists in this province is



about 240,000. I find that I have demanded more time than enough in asking you to allow me to the 25th of next month for the conversion of them all. I now think that the whole business will be finished before the end of this month."

Nor were these unmixed falsehoods. There was no small infusion of truth in the most exaggerated of the reports of Louvois and his officers. The spirit of martyrdom slumbered at that moment among the Protestants, or was tried by a test too sore for our frail humanity. It can, indeed, never be known whether even Polycarp or Ignatius would have borne up against the Dragonnades as firmly as they submitted themselves to the lions. Worried, disgusted, and exasperated beyond endurance, by a plague more loathsome than any which visited Pharaoh, multitudes of the Huguenots subscribed their names, or their marks, to lists laid before them by their tormentors, that they might so gain time and opportunity for flight from their native land. But for such emigrants the new code had set some of its most subtle springs. If any one who had subscribed the roll of the converted was found attempting an escape from France he was punished with the galleys as an emigrating Protestant. If he stayed at home adhering to his religion, he was punished with the same severity as a relapsed Catholic. To have hedged up his opponents in this inextricable dilemma is the ground on which Père la Chaise has been extolled by one of his eulogists as a bright model of legislative wisdom.

Whether such praise were due to him or not, there can be no doubt that both he and his royal penitent received with delight the accounts of the success of their Propaganda. It seemed to them, to Le Tellier, to Louvois, and to Madame de Maintenon, to have levelled all the difficulties which had hitherto forbidden the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. If, they asked, there was really but one religion in France *de facto*, why should there any

longer be more than one *de jure*? The sagacity of Madame de Maintenon, aided by her old Huguenot habits and remembrances, was indeed proof against these illusions. She well knew that the faith of her ancestors was indomitable, even by the Dragonnades of her husband; but with her cold and characteristic shrewdness she remarked, "the parents may be hypocrites, but the children will grow up to be good Catholics."

Yet, while the fatal decision was still in suspense, the Protestants omitted no practicable effort for their own deliverance. Many and pathetic were their appeals to the whole Christian commonwealth, and of these none was more eloquent than that of their great pastor Jurieu. But the custom-house officers of France were able to prevent the introduction there of a remonstrance, which all the doctors of France would have been unable to answer. To Louis himself his persecuted subjects addressed pictures of their distress, and petitions for relief, to which no human heart, unless rendered callous by bigotry, could have been insensible. But borrowing, as it is said, the language of Francis I., he told their deputies that, to restore unity of religion to his people, he would willingly employ one of his hands to chop off the other. Despair then dictated bolder courses; and the Protestants of Languedoc, of the Cevennes, of Vivarais, and of Dauphiné met to worship publicly in defiance of the law, that they might refute, by their numbers, the statements of their persecutors as to the multitude of the pretended abjurations. They came together, not with swords, but with Bibles in their hands; and, by the order of Louvois, hundreds of them were slaughtered either by his soldiers, or by the public executioners.

At length, on the 18th October, 1685, one of the darkest days in the dark annals of France, Louis XIV. signed the ordinance which revoked the Edict of Nantes. Those words might seem to imply that he merely abro-

gated that great charter of his illustrious ancestor. But the terms of his ordinance went much further than this, and merit peculiar attention.

“ Observing (so runs the preamble) with the gratitude which we so justly owe to God, that our cares have produced their desired result, since the better and the larger part of those who professed the religion calling itself Reformed, have embraced the Catholic faith, for which reason the further execution of the Edict of Nantes is useless,” therefore the royal legislator proceeded to enact, in substance, as follows : — The public celebration of the Protestant worship was no longer to be permitted in any part of his kingdom. All Protestant pastors were to quit France within fifteen days, and were to incur the punishment of the galleys for life if they should again officiate in that capacity. But any pastor who should conform to the Catholic Church was to receive a pension exceeding by one third his actual stipend, with a reversion of half of that pension to his widow ; and was to be at liberty to practise as an advocate, should such be his wish, without the usual academical studies. Every parent was required to send his children to the Catholic churches, and was forbidden to educate them as Protestants. All emigrants were to return to France within four months, or were to be subjected to the confiscation of all their property. The galleys for life in the case of men, and imprisonment for life in the case of women, were to be the penalties of an attempt to emigrate. To this catalogue of denunciations was added what, in appearance at least, was a just and humane indulgence. “ The members of this religion,” said the ordinance, “ may continue to inhabit the cities and other parts of our realm until it shall please God to enlighten them, without being molested on account of their religion, so long as they do not engage in the public exercise of it.”

It was with a kind of melancholy fitness that this per-

secuting edict was thus prefaced with a false apology, and closed by a faithless promise. It was false that the better and larger part of the Protestants had embraced the Catholic faith; it was a mere illusion and a snare to promise that the rights of conscience should be respected so long as the Huguenots did not worship publicly.

The resentment with which the heart rises against the royal author of so much guilt and misery is, however, almost silenced by the remembrance of the character of the court, and the spirit of the times, in which he lived. Hymned and deified, even in his crimes and follies, by such a chorus as that which daily greeted him with the incense of their flattery, how should a poor mortal man escape the intoxication, or think of himself as less than the God they made him? For they were no vulgar lips or pens which extolled his revocation of the Edict of Nantes, as amongst the greatest achievements of his life.

It may have been little that such was the strain of the ladies of his court — that Madame de Maintenon declared that the act “would cover him with glory before God and men” — and Madame de Sévigné, that “there never had been, nor could be, any other ordinance so magnificent, or any act of any other king so glorious, as this.” It was, perhaps, something more than the aged Le Tellier sang the *Nunc dimittis* of Simeon as, on the 18th of October, he attached the great seal of France to the ordinance, and actually died twelve days afterwards. But Louis had higher suffrages than these. His admirable grandson, the Duc de Bourgogne, anticipated “the astonishment with which all Europe would regard the extinction, by a single edict, of a heresy with which six preceding kings had contended in vain.” The great Arnauld, while describing the measure as “a little too violent,” declared that “he did not think it unjust.” The still greater Bossuet, and the eloquent Fléchier, called on their congregations to lift up

their voices in loud thanksgiving for this blessing to the Church. And the Gallican Church herself, as represented by her synod of May, 1685, that is, while the Dragonnades were yet in progress, had the intrepidity to assure the king that, "without violence, and without arms," he had induced all reasonable people to abandon heresy, and had "reclaimed the wanderers who, perhaps, would never have returned to the bosom of the Church, except by the road strewn with flowers which he had opened for them." The offence, therefore, was not that of Louis alone, nor did he alone sustain the punishment.

The edict of revocation was executed with inflexible rigour. The pastors, and amongst them the celebrated Claude, were driven into immediate exile. Vast crowds of fugitives, with more or less success, attempted to follow. Some bribed the guards stationed along the frontier. Some forced for themselves a passage with the sword. Delicate and aged women, says Benoît, might be seen crawling many weary leagues in the hope of escaping at once from their persecutors and from their country. Some of the younger, he adds (not, perhaps, without the involuntary smile which will occasionally light up the French countenance in its deepest gloom), disguised themselves by spoiling their complexions, by producing artificial wrinkles, and by pretending to be dumb. Few ships quitted the coast without carrying away fugitives stowed and hidden amidst the cargo. Many put to sea in open boats. The highways were thronged with Protestants yoked by chains to the most desperate criminals. Gentlemen who had, till then, lived in affluence and in honour, crowded the galleys of Marseilles; and women of every rank and condition of life filled, as prisoners, the convents and the gaols of France. The reign of terror, which was to deform the close of the succeeding century, was not more formidable or more extensive.

After the lapse of thirty eventful years from the revo-

cation of the Ediot of Nantes, Louis was an infirm and an aged man. He had survived his children and his grandchildren. He had been humbled by the victories of Eugene and Marlborough. He was overwhelmed with debt. He was hated by the people who had so long idolised him, and was compelled to listen to the indignant invectives which the whole civilised world poured forth against his blind and inhuman persecutions. Yet, in March, 1715, and within five months of his death, he published another ordinance, declaring that every man who had continued to reside in France after the ordinance of 1685, had given conclusive proof that he was a Catholic, because, if not a Catholic, he would not have been permitted to dwell there. It was, therefore, enacted, that every one who had avowed his purpose to persist in the Protestant religion should be regarded as a relapsed heretic, and punished accordingly. To quit France as a Protestant, had been declared, by the law of 1685, a crime punishable by the galleys for life. Not to have quitted France, was declared, by the law of 1715, conclusive proof of a voluntary continuance there as a Catholic. The code of persecution was again erected on flagrant absurdity and falsehood—the most fitting and convenient foundation for all such codes. And then the long career of him in whose name, and by whose sanction, it had been promulgated reached its close. He died, declaring to the Cardinals Rohan and Bissy, and to his confessor, the Jesuit Le Tellier, that, being himself altogether ignorant of ecclesiastical questions, he had acted under their guidance, and as their agent, in all that he had done against either the heretics, and on those his spiritual advisers he devolved the responsibility to the Supreme Judge.

We may well believe, as we must devoutly hope, that the decrees of that dread tribunal are often more lenient, as they are always more just, than the sentences which erring man pronounces on his fellows. And yet, however

deeply conscious of our liability to such error, we may not on that account shrink from the unwelcome duty of echoing the indignant reproaches which have been cast on the name of Louis the Persecutor by every generation which has been born into the world since his departure from it. Even though the posthumous infamy of such oppressors may be insufficient entirely to prevent the renewal of such oppressions, it is not altogether ineffectual; and History would abdicate one of her highest privileges and most sacred duties, if, in a faint distrust of her own influence, she hesitated, calmly indeed and gravely, yet decisively and unambiguously, to denounce the guilt, and to brand the memories, of such offenders against the religion of Christ and the welfare of mankind.

I have already taken occasion to avow my belief, that it is not only permitted to us to trace the march of a retributive Providence in the history of mankind, but that reverently and humbly to interpret the laws by which the Divine government of the world is conducted, is the highest of the ends with a view to which any wise man engages in a review of that history. To myself it seems impossible, that any such man should well consider the events which followed these persecutions, without regarding them as among the most signal examples of the retributive justice of God. Even they who dislike and avoid, as unphilosophical, the religious phraseology of such an avowal, are not seldom driven to the use of more circuitous, but not, I think, more profound, terms, to give expression to the same general meaning.

The extent of the depopulation to which France was subjected by the edict of October, 1685, has been estimated by many different writers of great authority, in terms varying with their respective sympathies, political or religious. The Duc de Bourgogne, anxious to vindicate his grandfather, appears to have concluded that the emigrants did not exceed 68,000. Voltaire calculates them as amount-

ing, in the first three years, to 50,000 families. Marshal Vauban represented to Louvois that, in five years, 100,000 Frenchmen had fled the country; and that 9,000 of the best seamen, with 12,000 soldiers and 600 officers, had joined the enemies of France. M. de Sismondi considers the loss to have exceeded 300,000 men; and M. Capéfigue, the latest writer on the subject, though most hostile to the name and the cause of the Protestants, reports, as the result of his searches into the still extant provincial records, that at least 225,000 of their number quitted the kingdom. But all these writers are agreed that the fugitives were amongst the bravest, the most intelligent, and the most industrious members of society; and that they carried with them into hostile countries the mechanical arts by which they had till then enriched their own, and by which they far more than repaid the hospitality which everywhere welcomed them.

Of the numbers who perished either in ineffectual attempts to escape, or in conflicts with the troops of Louvois, or on the scaffold, or in the prisons, or on the galleys, the conjectural estimates are still more various and uncertain. But no one disputes that the loss was enormous, or that the universal alarm and anxiety which were protracted during so many years, produced other and scarcely less lamentable evils. The cry of distress from the sufferers was answered from every part of Europe by a cry of pity and of indignation. It gave to the confederacy against Louis XIV. both the energy of the vindictive passions, and the support which, in drawing the sword, men derive from the belief that it is wielded in a sacred cause, and against the common enemy of mankind.

Such were the woes inflicted by Louis XIV. on his Protestant subjects. But even the members of his own religious community had terrible penalties to pay for dissent from his opinions. At the distance of three leagues from Versailles stood the splendid church and monastery of



Port Royal des Champs, where dwelt the Mère Angélique and her saintly sisterhood, and near them Pascal, Arnauld, Nicole, De Sacy, and their illustrious fraternity. Those learned men had declared themselves unable to find in the "Augustinus," a posthumous work of Cornelius Jansen, Bishop of Yprés, five propositions, which the Pope had discovered there, and had censured as heretical. Those holy women, being unable to read the Latin in which the book was written, had refused to affirm, either under their hands or with their lips, that those propositions might be found there by those who could read it. For these offences the king dispersed the whole of the brethren of Port Royal, and exiled many of them, levelled the monastery to the ground, exhumed, and gave to the dogs, the dead bodies of such of the fraternity as had been buried there, and committed the survivors to an imprisonment, from which death alone released them.

If the picture which I have thus laid before you of the administration of the government of France by Louis XIV. be indeed accurate, how, it may be asked, could it happen that no voices were raised in his own times and country to anticipate the reproaches of posterity? There were assuredly not wanting many men wise enough to perceive such evils, or courageous enough to protest against them. Why, then, were no such remonstrances raised?

I answer, first, by referring to the explanation which I gave in a former lecture of the methods by which literature had been not merely silenced on all political questions, but had been brought by the court into a dependence which was the more servile, because it was willingly, and even ostentatiously, borne. I answer, next, by denying the statement that the silence of the great men of France, on these subjects, was as complete as it is usually supposed to have been. Amongst such men a very high place is due to Fénélon, and to his pupil, the Duc de Bourgogne. Now every one is agreed that the romance of

Télémaque was designed to point out to the heir to the Crown of France some of the enormous abuses of the government of his grandfather. But the *Télémaque* is neither the only, nor the most impressive, of the protests made on that subject by its eloquent author.

It is impossible to state with precision what was the date of the letter from Fénelon to Louis XIV., which is to be found in the 8th volume of the works of D'Alembert, although it is certain that it was written after the death of Louvois in 1691. In her preface to Danjeau's *Memoirs*, Madame de Genlis has, indeed, disputed the authenticity of that letter altogether. She supposes it to have been forged by the sceptical philosopher who first gave it to the world; and she suggests that he was prompted to commit this crime, by his desire to give to his own disloyal principles the apparent sanction of one of the most revered of the divines of France, who was, at the same time, one of the holiest of her saints, and one of the most considerable of her men of letters. To myself the imputation appears altogether incredible. It was in his official character of secretary to the Royal Academy, that D'Alembert published his *Eloge* on Fénelon and the letter which is appended to it. To have been detected in the fraud imputed to him, would have been to expose himself to infamy and ruin; and the detection would have been perfectly easy, as he declared his manuscript of the letter in question to be authenticated by the handwriting of the Archbishop of Cambray himself. Little respect is, indeed, due to the political or religious principles of D'Alembert, but he was neither wicked enough, nor foolish enough, to expose himself to so terrible a risk, merely to gratify himself by blackening the reputation of a deceased monarch. Madame de Genlis' suspicions are also, I think, repelled by her own elaborate and indignant demonstration of the exact harmony between the supposed letter and many passages of the *Télémaque*. I therefore suppose it to be

genuine, and I think that the following extracts from it will demonstrate that one of the most profound and of the most intimate observers of what was passing in the court and kingdom of Louis XIV., regarded his administration of the government of France in a light not less, and perhaps even more, unfavourable than that in which I have hitherto represented it.

“He who takes the liberty, sire,” such is the commencement of the letter, “to address this communication to you, is one for whom the interests of this world have but little value. He is not prompted to write by pique, by ambition, nor by the wish to intermeddle in great affairs. Though you know not who he is, he loves you, and reveres in your person the delegated authority of God himself.” . . . . . “Be not surprised if he addresses you in terms of unusual emphasis. He does so because truth is at once free and fearless; but to truth you have not been accustomed to listen.”

“Your heart is naturally just and equitable. But they who had the charge of your education taught you, as your only principles of government, to be suspicious, and jealous, and haughty; to keep virtue aloof, to dread all eminent merit, to prefer the society of the flexible and the cringing, and to cherish an exclusive regard to your own personal interests.” .

“During the last thirty years, your chief ministers have deranged and reversed all the ancient maxims of our government, in order to elevate your authority, or rather that they might increase their own; for that authority was not really in your hands, but in theirs. The state and the laws are no more mentioned amongst us. The king and the royal pleasure are now all in all. Your ministers have infinitely extended both your revenue and your expenditure. They have extolled you to the heavens for having eclipsed the splendour of all your predecessors; or, in other words, for having impoverished the whole king-

dom, that so you might introduce into your court a luxury alike monstrous and incurable."

"You have, indeed, been jealous of your authority; too much so, perhaps, in whatever relates to mere externals; but, within his own appropriate province, each of your ministers has in reality been your master. Because you marked out the limits of the respective functions of those who really conducted your government, you imagined that you were yourself governing. They have been severe, haughty, unjust, violent, faithless. Whether in governing at home, or in negotiating with foreign powers, their only system has been that of menacing, crushing, and annihilating their opponents. They have habituated you to flatteries so outrageous, and even so idolatrous, that your own honour required your indignant rejection of them. They have rendered your name odious to the people of France, and insufferable to your neighbours."

Then after an exposure of the injustice of the wars and conquests of Louis, the writer proceeds. "Enough, sire, has been said to show you that, during your whole life, you have been wandering from the path of justice and of truth, and, therefore, from the path which the gospel prescribes. That long series of fearful calamities which have desolated the whole of Europe during the last twenty years, the blood so profusely shed, the multitude of the scandals which have been given, the cities and the villages laid in ashes, have been the lamentable results of that war of 1672, which was undertaken for your glory, and for the confusion of the gazetteers and medallists of Holland."

"Your people, whom you are bound to love as your children, and who have been enthusiastically devoted to you, are dying of hunger. The land is nearly thrown out of cultivation. The cities and the country are depopulated. All trades are languishing, and unable to afford subsistence to the artisans. All commerce is extinguished. In order

to make and to defend your vast external conquests, you have destroyed one half of the internal resources of your kingdom. All France is but one great hospital, desolate, and unprovided with the necessaries of life. It is yourself, sire, by whom these disasters have been created. In the ruin of France, everything has passed into your hands, and your subjects are reduced to live upon your bounty."

"You do not love God. You do not even fear him, except with a servile terror. It is not God you fear, but hell. Your religion is made up of superstitions, and of petty superficial observances. Scrupulous about trifles, you are untouched by the most terrible responsibilities. Your own glory, your own advantage, are the real and only objects of your love. You refer everything to yourself, as though you were the very God of this earth, and as though everything else in it had been called into existence, only that it might serve as a sacrifice to you."

Then follow very unfavourable portraits of the Archbishop of Paris, of La Chaise, the confessor of the king, of Madame de Maintenon, and of his other confidential advisers, with a denunciation of their infidelity to that great trust. "Perhaps," proceeds the letter, "you may ask what they, who are thus in your confidence, ought to say to you. I answer they ought to say thus:— 'Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, if you would not that God should humble you. Submit to the humiliation of making peace, and so expiate the glory which you have made your idol. Listen no more to the counsels of your flatterers. Restore to your enemies the conquests which you cannot retain with safety, or without injustice.' Sire, he who tells you these truths, is so far from being an enemy to your real interests, that he would lay down his life to ~~see~~ you such as God would have you to be; nor does he ever cease to pray for you."

Although I credit D'Alembert's assertion, that he tran-

scribed this letter from a manuscript authenticated by Fénelon himself, yet there is no proof that it was ever transmitted to Louis, or that he ever saw it, or heard of it. For the credit of the king, I would indeed gladly believe the story that it was conveyed to him by Beauvilliers at the instance of the writer; for if it be really true, that he received such a communication from the tutor of his grandson, and afterwards promoted him to the archbishopric of Cambray, we must all admit with D'Alembert that, for once at least, he nobly earned the title of "the Great."

I have stated that the Duc de Bourgogne also was one of those who felt and acknowledged the abuses of the government of his grandfather. I do not, of course, mean that he ever assumed the indecorous and undutiful office of a censor of the conduct of Louis XIV. Nothing could have been more repugnant to the spirit of that admirable prince, or to the lessons which he had received from Fénelon. But the *Télémaque* was written for his instruction; and in the imaginary court of Idomenée, the Duke unavoidably recognised the image of the court of Versailles. The impression left on his mind by that lesson, and by the similar lessons of his Mentor, was profound and lasting. He had a clear view of the evils under which France was labouring. He had a distinct foresight of the coming tempest, and an ardent desire to avert it. Amongst the papers which he left behind him, was one which attests how deeply these subjects had engaged his thoughts. It was a complete scheme of constitutional reformation. It contemplated the revival of the States General, and of the states of the various provinces, and the periodical convention of assemblies of the people in every canton of France. On the basis of these central and local institutions, and through their agencies, he hoped to provide at once for the stability of the throne, and for the good government of the people with their own support and concurrence.

If the Duc de Bourgogne had been permitted to ascend

that throne, and to carry his project into execution, what would have been the probable results of it? The answer to that question, if given by persons imbued with the spirit of our own government, would probably express their conviction that such a reform would have bestowed on France the greatest blessings for which any nation could be indebted to the sagacity and patriotism of its rulers. By such critics it would be applauded as a well-devised bond for the indissoluble union of the past, of the present, and of the future — as calling into healthful activity all those popular instincts and local attachments which constitute the main springs of the life and health of a great nation — as rendering tributary to the service of the state those home feelings, which, of all feelings, act with the most constant and irresistible energy — as affording to the various sections of the commonwealth the means of an invigorating yet amicable rivalry — as productive of that social harmony of which the indispensable basis is to be found only in diversity and in contrast — as providing for that concentration of power without which the state is impotent, and for that diffusion of power without which the central dominion must be despotic — and, above all, as affording the means of acquiring those habits of self-government which constitute the ultimate perfection of any civil polity.

All such anticipations and predictions must, however, have been derided by the French philosophers of that age, if they partook of the philosophical opinions which most find favour in France in our own. M. Alexandre Thomas, for example, the author of a book published in the year 1844, under the title of "*Une Province sous Louis XIV.*," would smile at such reveries as the dreams of narrow-minded men, by whom the region of pure ideas had ever been, and must ever be, unvisited. For, in that book, he describes the state of Burgundy, from 1661 to 1715, in order to establish the conclusions that

the institutions of that province, and that the French provincial institutions in general, in the reign of Louis XIV., were so entirely and irremediably absurd, that they never could have served as the foundations of any safe or salutary national reformation. M. Thomas is no ordinary writer. When he addresses himself to the arrangement of evidence, and to the narration of facts, he combines much of our English good sense with no less of the buoyant vivacity of a Frenchman. But when he unveils his theories, and writes as a philosopher, his style undergoes an extraordinary change. Between the glare of his eloquence and the darkness of his metaphysics, my own mental vision, at least, is effectually dazzled and overpowered. Nevertheless, as both his facts and his theories have a direct and very important bearing on any judgment we can form on the administration of the government of Louis XIV., I will not decline the attempt to indicate, though in as few words as possible, what are the discoveries, philosophical and historical, for which his readers are to be prepared.

I collect then, that, according to the doctrine of M. Thomas, there is a certain general law which regulates the progress of political society. Emerging from chaos, where its elements battle with each other in wild confusion, it makes a steadfast, though it may be a tardy, progress towards that perfect symmetry and order in which its ultimate perfection consists. Thus the anarchy of the tenth and eleventh centuries was the chaotic period of France. Out of that abyss first arose the feudal oligarchy — a state of orderly disorder. Then succeeded the Capetian despotism, destined to crush one after another of the countless feudal privileges, whether local and personal, — whether corporate and municipal, — whether legislative, administrative, or judicial, which, as so many conflicting wrongs, were arrayed one against another in unappeasable hostility. When the iron grasp of "royalty" had sub-



dued and annihilated them all, then "royalty," in the midst of the triumphs she had won, presented herself to the nation, in the person of Louis XIV., as the one gigantic privilege, the conqueror and the survivor of all the rest. The "mission" of "royalty" was now fulfilled; and when at last the indignant nation raised her voice in anger, then "royalty," confessing her own inherent weakness, bowed her head and fell. Then appeared a long succession of revolutionary systems, each of which, in turn, made some great stride towards that ultimate consummation of symmetry and order which form the perfection of political society. Distant as that perfection may appear to some, yet France has already attained, by the overthrow of all privileges—to unity, that is, to the concentration of power in the supreme government,—to equality, that is, the absolute uniformity of the political franchises of all citizens,—and to liberty, that is, the sovereign dominion of the people themselves. Unity, equality, and liberty are, therefore, those mighty and unrivalled powers, under the guidance of which France is advancing towards that high estate of national greatness and of social harmony towards which no other European people have as yet light enough even to aspire.

Perhaps the high tone of M. Thomas' colouring might have been subdued a little if he had postponed the publication of his book from 1844 to 1848. But the new shapes which unity, equality, and liberty assumed in the last of those years, would have detracted nothing from the value of the facts by which he undertakes to show how desperate and irremediable was the misgovernment of the French provinces during the reign of Louis XIV. I shall not, of course, affect to compress the results of such extensive inquiries into the fragment of time which remains at my disposal to-day. But neither can I entirely pass them over, for they are of the utmost importance in resolving the question—whether Louis XIV. was more wise in

extinguishing the privileges of the provinces of France, or the Duc de Bourgogne in regarding them as the ready basis on which to erect a free constitutional government?

It appears then, from the researches of M. Thomas, that, in the 17th century, the généralité of Bourgogne comprised the duchy of that name, with five counties, and three pays d'élection. The duchy and counties were under the immediate government of the Burgundian States General during their sessions; and, in the interval of those sessions, they were under the government of officers called Élus. The Burgundian States General were composed of the clergy and the nobility of the duchy, and of the deputies of the Tiers Etat. Each of the five counties sent thither deputies, representing the Tiers Etat of each. But the pays d'élection were not so represented. They were under the immediate government of the Crown.

The sessions of the Burgundian States General were holden once only in each three years, and were continued during about twenty days. Thus, with the exception of about three weeks in as many years, the duchy and the counties were destitute of any representative government, but lived under the authority of the Élus.

Each order appointed its own Élu, and other officers, called Alcades, who were to superintend and to control them. Each county had, in the same manner, a separate assembly, which appointed the Élu for the county. There were also royal officers having the same title of Élus, who were associated with the nominees of the States General and of the county assemblies.

Over all this official hierarchy presided the governor of the province of Burgundy, who represented the person of the king himself, and was invested with his prerogatives. In the 17th century, this government had passed into the hands of the great and powerful family of Condé, who

held it with an authority not very remote from that with which, in earlier times, the princes of the royal house had held their appanages.

This scheme of provincial administration already appears sufficiently complicated; but the want of symmetry, and what may be called logical method, was still more remarkable in the composition of the Burgundian States General. Our own ancient anomalies of the deserted mount of Old Sarum, or the highly ornamented park and gardens of Gatton, sending each two members of the House of Commons, when the great manufacturing cities of the north sent no members at all, were not more strange than the anomalies according to which the Burgundian States were constituted. They comprised between 400 and 500 members, of whom 72 only were commoners, the rest being clergy or nobles, who were not elected by their respective orders, but who held their seats *proprio jure*. Then, again, no one was eligible as a deputy of the Tiers Etat, unless he were a mayor or one of the chief échevins of a city; and of the two deputies representing the same place, one only had a vote. Neither could the deputies of the Tiers Etat select their Élus and Alcades at their pleasure. They were bound to choose them from the citizens of particular cities, according to a rotation, of which some cities had the benefit only on each alternate election, and of which other cities had so little share, that they might be said to be almost wholly excluded.

These anomalies (and many more which I omit) were reducible to no assignable principle whatever, but had their roots only in obsolete traditions and inveterate prejudices, and the proceedings of the States General were marked by a corresponding instability of purpose and of character. During the reign of Louis XIV. the hero of their history is Nicholas Brulart. He was a member of one of those high judicial families which transmitted, from

one generation to another, the presidency of the sovereign courts; and Brulart, therefore, at the age of thirty-four, found himself first president of the Parliament of Dijon. In that capacity he acquired great renown by his inflexible opposition to the commands of Mazarin. Having been sent to Perpignan as a prisoner, for refusing to register some of the edicts of the cardinal, he was released; and when the Prince de Condé again tendered to him the obnoxious edicts, "M. le Prince," was his celebrated answer, "the towers of Perpignan are distinctly visible from the place where we stand." In fact, Brulart was the very ideal of a French magistrate, really independent in his spirit, and not without a certain theatrical sublimity of demeanour and of discourse. But when Mazarin died, and Louis XIV. announced himself as his own chief minister, Brulart became an altered man. No longer sententious and epigrammatic about the dignity of his judicial character and the majesty of his office, he became an eloquent vindicator of the absolute and irresponsible authority of the young sovereign. Nor was this servility or baseness. Brulart, looking on the scene before him with the eye of a statesman, as statesmen went in those days, seems to have been sincerely convinced that the power and greatness of the state were inextricably bound up with the unrestricted power and independence of the king. In the name of the Burgundian States General, and as their president, he delivered a series of discourses, the general tone of which may be fairly inferred from the following extract from one of them:—

"The king being the first, and the permanent, spring of all tranquillity and virtue in his dominions, everything within them follows his impulse, and derives its character from him. Every profession is adorned by his virtues. The sciences are advanced, manners are purified, and religion is at length in repose; the calm is profound, the law is obeyed, the people are tranquil and

happy under his government; and all these blessings are the fruit of that sublime composure of mind with which he regulates all these interests, and watches over them all."

Such, during the twenty prosperous years of the reign of Louis, was the style of the States General of Burgundy, and of Brulart their president, in all their communications to the king, or to his representative. They were content to follow the chariot-wheels of the conqueror, and to swell the loud chorus of adulation. But with the reverses of Louis XIV. the language of the Burgundian States General underwent a total revolution. Eulogy gave place to bitter remonstrance, and the idol of yesterday became the object of the obloquies of to-day. M. Thomas follows out the history of these vicissitudes, and then, pursuing in full detail the career of the communes of Burgundy and of the Parliament of Dijon, convicts them all, in turn, of that instability of character, caprice, and unreasonableness, from which I suppose few such bodies would be found to be exempt, if their portraits were delineated with equal fidelity, and by as vigorous a pen. His particular inference is, that petty passions and local prejudices, unsettled principles and fluctuating opinions, narrow privileges and warring interests, disqualified the States General of Burgundy for the position assigned to them by the Duc de Bourgogne in his meditated constitution of France. His more general inference is, that as the States General of the other provinces were in no essential respect superior to those of Burgundy, the Duke's scheme rested altogether on a foundation of sand.

To a certain extent I am not disposed to controvert or to doubt this conclusion. On the contrary, I think that M. Thomas has well explained why the provincial governments of France were impotent to control the central authority, and were, at the same time, indisposed to co-operate with it, and were not, in fact, elements out of

which a system of order and of good government could have spontaneously arisen. But I am aware of no proof, nor of any argument to show that the evils of these provincial constitutions were irremediable. I do not believe that the Duc de Bourgogne meditated building on such foundations until they first had undergone the improvements which they both admitted and required. His policy was at once to adhere to the ancient landmarks, and to strengthen them; and if he had lived, he would at least have attempted to meet the exigencies of "the great innovator, Time," by reformatations, to be sanctioned and established by the people at large, both in the Local States of the various provinces, and in the States General of the kingdom at large.

I gather, however, from such acquaintance as I have with the modern literature of France, that M. Thomas expresses the general opinion of his contemporaries and fellow-countrymen, in commending Louis XIV. for reducing the Provincial States to utter insignificance, instead of assigning a place for them in any enlarged basis of his government. That monarch at present enjoys the praise, such as it is, of having extinguished, one after another, all the institutions of France, which, if not so overthrown by him, might, it is said, have enabled his dynasty to wage a successful war against the democratic usurpations of the close of the 18th century. He is extolled as a great innovator in his own despite; as having well fulfilled his high destiny of contributing more than any other man to the preparation of that *tabula rasa*, on which modern philosophy was to inscribe so long a series of constitutions, charters, and schemes of revolutionary government.

To myself it appears a mere prejudice to deny, that France has derived from the subversion of her ancient monarchy advantages so vast, that we must hesitate to declare that even the incalculable price which she has paid for them has been really excessive. Louis XIV. may be justly

entitled to the praise of having been the unconscious instrument of bringing those results to pass ; but, if so, it is no very exalted commendation. Still less is it any good title to the gratitude of the world, if, as I believe, the motives by which he was guided were for the most part selfish, narrow, and contracted. I would gladly, if possible, concur in the enthusiasm which his name still excites in the land over which he reigned so long. Although there be no national prejudices predisposing us to such favourable feelings, and though there be many such prejudices indisposing us to them, there is yet in the image which presents itself before us, when we read his own writings, the memoirs of his friends, and the eulogies of his admirers, something which it is impossible not to admire, something which we must occasionally revere, and something which we must now and then even love. Yet, when ceasing to think of the man as he lived among his kindred and his friends, we estimate the king as he governed the people subject to his power, a far more severe judgment on him seems to me inevitable.

“L’Etat c’est moi” became at length no empty boast, but the arrogant avowal of a melancholy truth. In the lips of the sultan, or of the sophy, it would have been not only an exact, but a very reasonable, epitome of the constitution of the despotism over which each of them reigned. In those oriental autocracies, the science of government is reducible to the stern alternative, that the ruler must either strike off the heads of those who resist his will, or forfeit his own head. But the system of the French monarchy was never thus terribly simple. It was most remote from such simplicity in the days of Louis XIV. It was, on the contrary, a complex mechanism, of which each part was essential to the activity of the rest. It was a living body, the vitality of which consisted in the conservation and the mutual support of all its integral members. To detach the Crown from its alliance with the States General, with the Provincial

States, with the Parliament, the Municipalities, and the Magistracy, was to aim a suicidal blow at the Crown itself. They were the buttresses of the throne, which could not long stand erect after their overthrow. They were the indispensable bulwarks of the third dynasty, which was evidently foredoomed to perish so soon as they should fall. That ancient and venerable aristocracy of privilege, which, by attracting to itself the homage of the people, was enabled in its turn to render to the sovereign a yet more important homage, could not be degraded by him without inducing his own degradation.

But pride and flattery blinded the eyes of Louis to these obvious and familiar truths. He would be the one power in the state, and presumptuously imagined that such independence and isolation might be at once practicable and enduring. He had the presumption to invite literature and commerce to take shelter beneath that solitary rule, not perceiving that he was thus about to nourish in their infancy powers which, in their maturity, must annihilate the protector beneath whose shadow they had grown up. He had the temerity to rule, as well as to reign, in his own person, not foreseeing that the responsibility thus incurred must one day be fatal to the reverence, the admiration, and the terror, which formed the real basis of his authority. But, above all, he forgot that no dominion can at once be hereditary and despotic, — that although he might transmit to his descendants his own extreme and unlimited rights, he could not transmit to them the talents or the fortune necessary to render such rights effectual, — and that, according to the established laws of nature, an heir and successor to his Crown must ere long appear, who would want the capacity to sustain that burdensome inheritance, and who yet would be neither willing to abandon it, nor able with safety to attempt so hazardous a resignation.

It was by these egregious errors, as well as crimes, of



Louis XIV. and his councillors, that William, as the head of the great League of Augsburg, was enabled to wrest from the king of France, and to vindicate as his own, the position which Henry IV., and Richelieu, and Mazarin, and even Louis XIV. himself, has assumed, as the protector and guide of the Protestant powers. This hereditary weapon of his house was thenceforward turned with fatal efficacy against it. The victories of Eugene and Marlborough, the humiliations of Gertruydenberg, and the concessions of Utrecht, were all among the direct results of the Dragoonades, of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and of the other offences by which his reign was disgraced, and his memory degraded.

But they were not the only or the most fatal results. The age in which Louis XIV. lived was far too enlightened for the submissive endurance of such enormities as his. They gave birth to new and dangerous ideas. They suggested questions never to be discussed with safety, in any land in which the fictions of government are, at the same time, falsehoods. They provoked even the devout Fénélon to inquire into the grounds on which the will of a single man was to be the arbiter of the happiness of millions. They contributed largely to dissolve the illusions of French loyalty to the absolute king of France. Great as was the descent from the *Télémaque* to the Social Contract, that descent had now become inevitable. The grave protests of the Archbishop of Cambray against the glaring infringements of the laws of the gospel, and of the feelings of humanity, ripened at last into the protest of Rousseau against the fundamental principles of all human society. Among the countless causes which were to combine to overthrow the dynasty of the Bourbons, and to conduct the descendants of Louis XIV. to the scaffold and to exile, few were more active than the blind and bigoted zeal with which, at the bidding of priests, of women, and of evil counsellors, and especially of Le Tellier and Louvois, he

sentenced so large a portion of his unoffending neighbours and his guiltless subjects to unmerited sufferings of the same general nature.

That in all the wise and equitable judgments of Him whose judgments are alone of any real importance to the highest or to the meanest of us, the offences of Louis XIV. may have been mitigated by many considerations of which Omniscience can alone take cognisance, I willingly and gladly believe. He was a man of many noble purposes, and of many generous impulses, and he laboured under disadvantages and temptations by which no other man was ever so powerfully assailed. But to us he is known only as the depository of one of the highest trusts which was ever committed by God to any of his creatures; and, as his elevation was eminent, and his abuse of it conspicuous, so, according to a general law of our existence, was the magnitude of his offence proclaimed by the magnitude of the punishment which it drew upon himself, and on those whose felicities or sorrows were inseparable from his.

If any teacher of what is called the "positive" shall reject this teaching as puerile or as superstitious, let him at least substitute some other explanation of phenomena which no scepticism can dispute, and of sequences which no incredulity can deny. In the meanwhile we will cling to our long-cherished belief, that the bonds are still unbroken and indissoluble which, as our Bibles assure us, connected together, in the days of old, the oppression of the just with the judicial chastisement of the oppressor.

## LECTURE XXVI.

ON THE CONDITION OF THE THREE ESTATES UNDER  
THE ABSOLUTE MONARCHY.

HAVING laid before you an outline of the structure of the absolute monarchy of France, and of the administration of it, from Henry IV. to Louis XIV., I am now to inquire what were the results of that scheme of government on the different ranks of the French people. Contracted as has been the scale of the preceding sketches, I must still further reduce it in approaching a subject of so much compass and variety. But I propose to myself merely to stimulate, and not to gratify your curiosity,—to indicate rather than to traverse one very important field of historical inquiry.

Although the absolute monarchy reached its culminating point during the reign of Louis XIV., the effects of it on the kingdom at large were not completely developed during his own lifetime, nor until the population of France was chiefly composed of the grandchildren of those Frenchmen who were living at his death. Nor was it till that age that the materials had been collected and made public, from which the advance

or decline of the people at large could be confidently delineated or inferred. I shall therefore have occasion, in the present lecture, to advert to dates considerably more recent than those to which I have hitherto confined myself, and to draw, from comparatively modern times, the proofs I have now to lay before you of the influence in modern France of that mysterious law which holds the children responsible, from age to age, for the conduct of their progenitors.

I had formerly occasion to explain how the internal, the judicial, and the financial liberties of the Gallican Church were successively invaded, and to a great extent destroyed, by the successive kings of France, until, in all those respects it had, in the reign of Louis XIV., become subservient to the ambition and cupidity of the Crown. I will now endeavour to show, as far as may be practicable, what was the actual state of the Church about the middle of the 18th century, when it had finally assumed the form and character, which the rule or the influence of Louis XIV. had impressed upon it. You will of course understand me as referring only to the external state of the ecclesiastical body, and to the relations into which it had been brought with the various political bodies of the realm. The religious or spiritual condition of it is a subject falling within the province of other teachers in this place.

The church establishment of France about the year 1750 was magnificent. It comprised eighteen archbishoprics, and one hundred and sixteen bishoprics. Every diocese was divided into vicariats, over each of which a grand vicar of the bishop presided. Every grand vicar was a member of the chapter of the diocesan cathedral. In every such cathedral there was also a chapter of canons. The total number of such canons in the kingdom was estimated at five thousand five hundred. There were also seven hundred abbeys in France, holden

“in commendam;” that is, the abbé, or head of the house, was entitled to commend or delegate the discharge of his duties to some other ecclesiastic. The number of priories was at least equal to that of the abbeys, although the average annual value of them was much less. To these religious houses or endowments are to be added various collegiate chapters, and chapters of canons. The whole of this capitular establishment is said to have comprised about twelve thousand persons. The whole of their collective incomes was estimated at thirty-nine millions of livres. The disparities of rank, of power, and of emolument between the different divisions of the whole body, and between the different members of each separate division, were enormous. The income of some bishops, for example, was fiftyfold greater than the income of some others; and some dioceses embraced more than ten times as many parishes and people as were to be found in some other dioceses.

The secular clergy of France ministered in no less than thirty-five thousand parishes. In each was established a curé, or incumbent, although when the parish was very small the incumbent was not seldom a pluralist. In large parishes the curés were assisted by vicars, whose duties and emoluments may be compared with those of curates in our own church. The regular clergy lived in monastic houses. There was about an equal number of such houses for the reception of nuns; but the number of nuns in France was much greater than the number of monks. Some of the monasteries or convents were of vast extent, and were possessed of princely incomes. In some of them no one could be admitted except women of noble birth and of considerable fortune. In others the community was maintained entirely by alms. The total number of recluses, male and female, were supposed to be about fifty thousand.

The occupations of the monastic orders were extremely

various and dissimilar. Some of the women devoted themselves entirely to prayer and meditation. Others undertook the care of the sick, and the education of girls. The Sœurs de Charité, who then, as now, laboured in the hospitals, formed a body comprising many thousand members, amongst whom, however, a large proportion were bound by no religious vows. Of the monks, some, like the Benedictines, gave themselves up to literary or scientific labour;—some, like the Trappistes, to austerities and manual toils;—some, like the Oratoriens, to the education of youth;—and some, like the Fathers of Mercy, to works of beneficence.

Monastic vows, whether taken by men or by women, were generally irrevocable, though there had sprung up in the 18th century two or three societies in which it was otherwise. As a general rule, no woman could make an irrevocable vow under eighteen, and no man under twenty-five years of age.

To this great ecclesiastical establishment were attached many hundred hospitals for the relief of the sick, and a multitude of schools. The order of the Knights of Malta, or of St. John of Jerusalem, so far as it was composed of Frenchmen, was also an appendage of the same body. There were in France a variety of estates or commanderies, the lucrative management or stewardship of which was set apart as a reward or superannuation allowance for the members of the order after a certain length of service. Of those commanderies the ten most lucrative were reserved for knights who had reached the dignity of the Grand Cross. Two hundred others were set apart for the ordinary knights; fifty were distributed among the esquires.

The Church was not allowed to increase its immovable property, or to alienate any immovable property which it actually possessed. Between the mortmain laws of France and England there was a close similarity, the same motives

having dictated them in either country. The French law, however, outran the strictness of our own. It forbade the creation of any new religious institute without the royal licence; and it declared that any person taking an irrevocable religious vow should be considered as civilly dead, that is, as incapable of either alienating or acquiring property. On a former occasion I stated that in the year 1639 an ecclesiastical synod represented the gross annual revenue of the Church in France, as amounting to 103,500,000 crowns, and the net annual revenue as amounting to 92,000,000. About a hundred and fifty years later, Necker estimated the whole revenue of the Church at 130,000,000 of livres, a sum so large that I hesitate even on his authority to assent to the estimate. The livre of that day was nearly equivalent to the fifteenth of a pound sterling.

The clergy was a body composed of persons drawn from every rank of society. But, in general, the higher and more valuable preferments, such as bishoprics, abbeys, and canonries, were bestowed on the sons of noble and distinguished families; the inferior benefices, such as parochial cures, and stalls in the less important chapters, being bestowed on the sons of the Haute Bourgeoisie; while the petty livings, the convents, and the mendicant orders, were filled by persons of low birth, of narrow fortunes, and of little interest. The king was the patron of the bishoprics, of the abbeys held in commendam, and of the greater priories. The other ecclesiastical preferments were either at the disposal of the bishop of the diocese, or of the chapters, or of the lay seigneurs. All patrons who were not themselves bishops, nominated clerks to vacant benefices subject to the bishop's consent.

The sacerdotal office afforded to persons of low rank the means of raising themselves to a higher station in society, while to the noblesse and the higher bourgeois, it afforded the means of maintaining their hereditary social position.

And as the candidates within the reach of such secular motives were very numerous, so the considerations which determined the choice of the patrons were but seldom of the most elevated kind. The Gallican Church was thus burdened with a multitude of pastors who had no genuine vocation to that sacred office, and who, instead of discharging the duties of it in the spirit of faith, of humility, of devotion, and of self-denial, were enslaved by habits of indolence, of luxury, and even of licentiousness. Such persons had become in that age a lamentable scandal to the sacred body of which they were members, and to the religion which it was their duty to inculcate. This is especially true of that assemblage of young abbés, the members of distinguished families, with whose names you meet in every delineation of Parisian society in the reign of Louis XV. Many such persons, though enjoying large ecclesiastical benefices, were eminent not only as men of letters, but as political partisans, as leaders in the world of fashion, and as revellers in all the dissipations and intrigues of that corrupt capital. The number of these titular abbés was also continually increasing. As the influence of religion declined, candidates for admission into the monasteries and convents became more and more infrequent, until several of those houses were deserted by their proper inmates, and reduced to simple abbeys or priories over which new ecclesiastical sinecurists, with the title of Abbé, were appointed to preside. And as the relations of the sacerdotal body to society at large became more and more secular, so the relations of the members of that body to each other were not exempt from serious scandals. There was a strange and offensive contrast between the poverty and humble rank of the curés and the bourgeois canons, and the high connections, the wealth, and the dignity of the bishops and the great abbés. Jealousy and ill will divided the two ranks from each other; and the inferior clergy were loud in denouncing the



splendour and other temporal advantages of their more fortunate brethren as so many allurements which at once attached them to the world and alienated them from the Church. These reproaches were echoed with still greater bitterness by multitudes of the common people. They complained of the exemption of the great ecclesiastical dignitaries from the ordinary fiscal burdens. They were exasperated by the demand and collection of tithes, and became eager partisans of the claims of the parliaments to receive appeals from the spiritual courts, and so to circumscribe, if not to destroy, their jurisdiction.

No one now doubts the injustice of the censures of which, a hundred years ago, the higher orders of the clergy of France were indiscriminately the object. If the bishops were not a little worldly minded, they were, at least, men of decorous lives. If they did not aspire after the glories of canonisation, they were seldom forgetful of the decencies of their high position. If in the days of their prosperity they were but too prompt to conform to the manners and habits of a luxurious age, some of them were able, when the day of trial came, to sacrifice everything, life itself not excepted, as martyrs to the truth. It is, therefore, a matter of deep interest to ascertain in what light the French clergy regarded their own prospects and duties at the time when that evil day was rapidly approaching; nor can that information be collected from any more authentic source than that of the cahiers, or written instructions, which the clergy in each bailliage of France addressed to the deputies whom they elected to represent them at the States General of Versailles, in the year 1789. A complete summary and copious extracts of them are to be seen in the volumes published, in that year, under the superintendence and with the sanction of the Comte d'Artois, afterwards Charles X.

It may seem almost superfluous to say that, as a body, the Gallican clergy were, at this period, exclusive and

intolerant. The persecutions of the Protestants had been pursued, with but few occasional pauses, from the revocation of the Edict of Nantes until the very year in which the States General of Versailles were assembled. To the Roman Catholic clergy the union of the Gallican Church and State appeared to be so sacred and so indissoluble, that the endurance by the state of any rival church, would be not only unwise, but impious. The torch of the true faith (such was the language of some of their cahiers) had illuminated the Gallic nation even before the Frankish conquest. On that event (they added) the victors had embraced the religion of the vanquished, nor since the time of Clovis had any other been publicly professed, either by the nation or by her rulers. After thus assuming the absolute identity of the creeds of the 5th and of the 18th centuries, the clergy of the latter age held that in the impending innovations on the civil government, the Catholic Apostolic and Roman religion ought to be maintained inviolate, and ought exclusively to enjoy the right of public worship. This they regarded as nothing less than a fundamental law of the realm, — a law, teeming, as they observed, with two inevitable consequences; the first, that every other society of Christians should be forbidden from meeting together for the celebration of any religious offices; the second, that the existing prohibitory laws against them should be maintained inviolate.

The desecration of the Lord's day and of other holy days, was regarded by the Catholic clergy as a great and growing evil. In their cahiers, they lamented the execution of public works at those sacred seasons. They acknowledged that, in this respect, they were rebuked and confounded by the more rigid habits and the better example of the Protestants. They therefore invoked the enactment and execution of penal laws against these abuses. They claimed for the ecclesiastical authority the exclusive right either to grant or to refuse licences for

the performance, on Sundays or on Saints' days, of any particular works which might be vindicated on the plea of necessity; and they required that the public prosecutor should be bound to proceed against any violators of the law whom the clergy should denounce to him.

The literature of the age had excited the lively apprehensions of the sacerdotal body from one end of France to the other. "It may be said" (I am quoting from the cahier adopted at Evreux) "that in this age of rapidly advancing infidelity the depravity of manners has even outrun the extravagance of opinion. The most venerable observances of our forefathers have fallen into contempt. All men are self-emancipated from the restraints of virtue. A thousand audacious pens are demanding the right of diffusing universally through the press all the unhallowed dreams of a diseased imagination." How, then, did they propose to arrest this torrent of licentious printing? In their judgment the only effective prevention was to be found in the increased severity of the law. They demanded that every printer should be made responsible for every work which should pass through his hands. They required that the penalties to be inflicted on authors should no longer be an ineffectual censure, but a real punishment rendering the offenders infamous,—that the censorship should be continued,—that the censor himself should be subjected to severe correction for any faithless discharge of his duty, — that an ecclesiastical board should be established to superintend the execution of the law against the abuses of the press, — that the public prosecutor should proceed at once against any offender whom that board might denounce to him, — that officers should be specially appointed to watch against the sale of any irreligious, immoral, or licentious books, — and that all anonymous publications should be forbidden. Still, desiring not to be altogether outstripped by the fashions of the times, the clergy advocated what it seemed good to them

to call "the Liberty of the Press," though subject to all these restraints and to such other precautions as might be requisite to prevent the abuse of that liberty.

From the sabbath-breakers and the libellers without the Church, the clerical orders next turned their attention to what they regarded as the urgent abuses within her pale. Of these, the neglect of discipline appeared to them the chief. This evil they traced to the disuse of the ecclesiastical synods, which, they said, had in earlier times promoted the interests of piety and checked the growth of those abuses which will gradually develop themselves in every Christian society. They anticipated a return to better habits of holiness and virtue from the immediate convention of a National Council, and from the restoration of Provincial Councils or Diocesan Synods, to be holden periodically at intervals of five or of three years. The clergy were well convinced that in such sacerdotal assemblies (for the admission of lay members was, of course, never contemplated) there would be found both the power and the will to establish effectual canons for the discipline and right government of all the members, lay or clerical, of the ecclesiastical society, in whatever related either to faith or to practice; and they maintained that, if this anticipation should not be verified by the result, it would be the duty of the National Legislature to come to their aid by laws of a secular origin.

With regard to their own body, the clergy of France freely acknowledged the necessity of some considerable reforms. They confessed that too many benefices were often conferred upon a single priest. Many good pastors, they said, lived in poverty, and died with no secular reward. Many, whose nobility and high connections were their only merit, had (they added) been over-laden with their vast ecclesiastical incomes. They thought that no man having one benefice of 1,500 livres per annum, ought to receive a second.

The non-residence of the clergy was another evil much deplored by these ecclesiastical reformers, and against which they invoked the legislative interference of the States General. But they condemned with much greater vigour, and, as it would appear, with still more justice, the misuse by the Crown and by others of the power of Church patronage. The sacred canons, they said, required that all offices in the Christian ministry should be conferred on the most worthy, on those who would best promote the interests of the Church and of religion. Let but all patrons make this the rule of their conduct; and there would (they exclaimed) be an end to all the cabals of avarice and ambition, and the Church would no longer be called from day to day to mourn over so many ministers who are disgracing her by the scandal of their lives. As, however, this renovation, however desirable, was not much to be anticipated, the first step towards it would, they hoped, be taken by the king himself. They suggested to him that he ought not to reserve all the high places in the Church for the nobility alone, but that virtue, desert, and talents should be encouraged and rewarded without reference to the ancestry of the candidate. They, however, regarded the royal attachment to the Church as an inadequate security for the observance of these salutary counsels; and they proposed, therefore, that there should be a Council of Conscience, composed wholly or in part of ecclesiastics, whose duty it should be to collect intelligence as to the qualifications of different clerks in holy orders, and on each vacancy to present to the king the name of the fittest successor. In the choice of bishops, however, it was not thought desirable to impose these fetters on the freedom of the monarch. He was solicited only to choose them rather with regard to their merits than to their birth, and especially to choose no one who had not passed through a sufficient noviciate, and a satisfactory probation in the lower ranks of the clerical order, as a parish priest or otherwise.

The French clergy encountered the usual difficulties in suggesting any remedy from the abuse of private patronage. The reconciliation of the right of the patron to use his own property for his own temporal benefit, with the right of the people that it shall be used for their spiritual advantage, is a problem which in all lands seems to refuse any solution within the reach of the legislature or the law. All possible plans were passed in review: as, for example, a limitation of age, so as to prevent the advancement of very young men; a limitation of choice, so as to prevent the selection of men inexperienced in the sacerdotal office, or unknown in the diocese in which they were to serve; the obligation of nominating at each vacancy several candidates from amongst whom the bishop might make his choice; and the relief of the Church from superannuated clergymen, by appropriating a large part of the capitular revenues to the payment of pensions for their maintenance.

In one part of France, and there only, the clergy had the courage to touch a higher note than any of these, on the subject of Church patronage. At Saumur, they demanded the abolition of the Concordat between Francis I. and Leo X. That is, they asked for the abandonment by the king of the choice of bishops, and the restitution to the deans and chapters of the various cathedrals, or to the collective clergy of the diocese, of the ancient right of electing their own diocesans.

Such were the ecclesiastical reforms contemplated by the clergy on the eve of the great Revolution. Let us next see what was their own estimate of the rights, whether honorary or proprietary, of their order. Conscious of the inevitable necessity of surrendering their fiscal immunities, they declared, and certainly not without a good deal of intrepidity, that they had hitherto asserted and preserved their own exclusive right of self-taxation, merely in the hope of imparting the same right to every class of their

fellow citizens. Yet, in the same breath, they insisted on the conservation of all their immunities, their dignities, their jurisdictions, their rank, and their pre-eminence, that precious deposit (they said) which had been transmitted to them through fourteen centuries of unbroken possession. They protested against whatever should impair the importance, restrain the power, or divide the unity of their order. They bound themselves to oppose any pretension to amalgamate the clergy with either of the other two orders, and commanded their representatives strenuously to assert two all-important principles—the first, that the whole sacerdotal body constitutes one indivisible hierarchy, descending from the sovereign pontiff to the lowest clerk, ascending from the lowest clerk to the sovereign pontiff, he being the visible head of the Church, and vicar of Christ, her invisible head — the second, that since in the annals of the monarchy no period could be found at which the clergy were not pre-eminent over every other body in the state, that pre-eminence ought still to be enjoyed by them.

In favour of the hierarchy whose claims were thus loftily asserted, a long series of proposals were made for the better division of the collective revenues of the Church, for the better demarcation of parishes, and for the preservation of ecclesiastical edifices. To my immediate purpose of exhibiting to you the character of the Gallican clergy in the 18th century, as delineated by themselves, it is more material to observe that they were still more zealous for the maintenance of all the religious orders. They proposed that both the nuns and the monks should be employed in some useful works, as in nursing the sick, instructing the young, or in the study of ecclesiastical literature. They desired, however, that methods should be taken for rescuing the mendicant orders from their dependence on alms which, it was said, the continually diminishing charity of the world renders more and more precarious; and since it was found no longer possible to fill the monasteries with persons of the prescribed ages, it was recommended that

the law should be so far altered as to allow younger men and women to bind themselves by irrevocable vows.

On the subject of the relations to be maintained with the Protestant (or, as they are called, the non-Catholic) inhabitants of France, the Gallican clergy in the year 1789 exhibit an example, rather instructive than rare, of the union of the general theory of toleration with an inflexible resolve never to tolerate dissent of any kind in practice. Slowly and reluctantly borrowing from the political writers of the day some vague precepts of indulgence to the errors of our misguided fellow Christians, they escaped the inferences towards which all such maxims point by distinguishing between civil and religious toleration ; that is, they were willing that the law should recognise the births, baptisms, marriages, and other acts affecting the Protestants in their civil capacity as members of the commonwealth, but on condition that they should never engage in the public exercise of their religion. This civil toleration (as it was then called) had already been established by a royal edict. That new law had extended so far as to legalise Protestant marriages. It was even supposed, by some interpreters of it, to authorise the nomination by a Protestant patron of a Roman Catholic clerk to a vacant benefice. The edict alarmed the clergy from one end of France to the other. They declared themselves unable to conceal the lively terror it had inspired. They said that it had enlarged the ambitious views of the Protestants, and had kindled in them the hope of obtaining various high offices from which, till then, they had been excluded ; and especially judicial offices. They expressed their hope that no heretic would ever be permitted to be a judge, or to be the head of any municipal body, — that they might be compelled to have all their children baptized in the parish churches, and not elsewhere, — and that mixed marriages between Catholics and Protestants might not be permitted,



The clergy of France in that age, as in our own, claimed for themselves the superintendence of public education. They proposed that the chief agents in this work should be the various religious orders, and that all colleges should be subject to the control of the ordinary of the province in which they were situate. Regretting the general decay of those institutions, they ascribed it chiefly to the expulsion of the Jesuits. They proposed that no school should be permitted unless it were established according to law, and kept by teachers to be nominated by the parochial clergy, and, when necessary, dismissed by them. The project for placing the education of the young throughout the kingdom in the hands of the clergy was drawn out into great length, and of course comprised the exclusion of all heretical teachers, not only from the national establishments, but also from every school which might be opened by private persons — a condition which is repeated with the most anxious reiteration in almost every clause of the general project.

The only other topic peculiarly connected with ecclesiastical interests and affairs which, as far as I can discover, is noticed in the cahiers of the clergy, is that of the conflict of jurisdiction between the temporal and the spiritual courts. I had formerly occasion to observe that on this subject there was almost a complete agreement between the laws of England and of France. In either kingdom the Royal Courts and the Church Courts had each their respective provinces, but with this distinction. If the spiritual tribunal overleapt its proper limits, the parliaments might review their sentences, and restrain their further proceedings; but there was no corresponding power in the ecclesiastical tribunals for preventing encroachment of the secular courts on their authority. The bishops and their vicars had long and vehemently, though unsuccessfully, demanded the redress of this supposed wrong; and they still persisted in asserting their inde-

pendence on all temporal judges at the moment when every national institution, secular or religious, was about to perish.

The cahiers of the clergy are not confined to questions or to interests of a theological nature. On the contrary, they travel through the whole system of the French government, advising how the States General should in future be organised and convened, what should be the privileges of their members, and what their manner of voting. They comprise a complete plan for the new constitution of the monarchy, with the sketch in full detail of a Bill of Rights. They travel over the whole subject of the Provincial States, and lay down plans for the reform of all the judicial tribunals; for the reconstruction of the civil, criminal, and municipal codes; for the readjustment of the financial system in all its details, for the improvement of agriculture, the government of the militia, the control of the Royal Domain, the amendment of the game laws, the extinction of feudal tenures, the encouragement of commerce, the elevation of the Tiers Etat, the regulation of the privileges of the Noblesse, and for the better conduct of the military service. In short, there was no one topic connected with the interests and the duties of the king or of his people in their various political relations to each other, on which the clergy did not enter and on which they did not express a very decisive opinion. So strange was the inaptitude for the real business of public life by which not they only, but every other class of Frenchmen, were at that time affected! The nation was visited by an epidemic impatience. Everything was to be discussed, determined, and accomplished at once. No foundations however ancient, no landmarks however venerable, no prejudices however deeply rooted, no principles however indisputable, were to be respected. Every point in the entire compass of political inquiry was to be debateable. In the impetuosity of the national character, the clergy, in

common with all the other orders in the state, forgot that no safe and effectual advance can be made in reformation unless when there is a basis of fixed doctrines and fundamental institutions, from which the reformer is to depart, and upon which he is to operate. The clergy, indeed, were willing to assume the infallibility of the Church of Rome as such a basis. Her creeds, her government, her dignities, and her possessions were to be esteemed sacred and inviolate. She was to be spared; but against every other part of the social edifice the winds and currents of innovation were to beat with all their violence, let the overthrow be what it might.

I have entered into the preceding account of the general condition of the ecclesiastical order in France in the 18th century, and I have extracted from their cahiers so many statements of their views of the great ecclesiastical and political questions of those days, because I know not from what other source a clearer illustration could be drawn of the influence which the genius and institutions of the absolute monarchy had exercised over the ecclesiastical order. Thus, with the single exception of the clergy at Saumur, there was not, so far as I can perceive, a single clerical body who had at once the discernment to detect, and the courage to complain of, the bondage to which the Church had been reduced by the Crown. At Saumur, and there only, was it felt and avowed that the liberties of which the Gallican Church had been taught to boast, were but so many galling fetters, at once the badge and the instrument of her slavery.

The Concordat between Francis I. and Leo X., the basis of these imaginary liberties, was in fact nothing else than the abandonment by the king to the pontiff, and by the pontiff to the king, of whatever tended to check the despotism of either. The Pope acquiesced in the usurpation by the Crown of the patronage of all the sees and sacerdotal dignities of France; and the King acquiesced in the

exaction by the Pope from the inferior clergy of the various tributes which had so long been the subject of disputes between them. When the absolute monarchy was fully established, the royal patronage became a far more oppressive burden than the Papal exactions. It gave a secular, a courtly, and a debasing character to the whole ecclesiastical system. From one end of France to the other the Crown was represented by a hundred and thirty-four prelates, and by the abbots and abbesses, priors, rulers of hospitals, and knights of the order of St. John of Jerusalem, all or nearly all of whom were men of noble birth, who owed their elevation in the Church to their alliances with the ministers or the favourites of the king. Every member of this hierarchy was an aspirant after some yet higher promotion, the poor bishop seeking a richer see, the rich bishop aiming at the archiepiscopal mitre, and the archbishop feeding his mind with hopes of a royal nomination to a seat in the Sacred College. The whole prelacy were thus dependants on the good pleasure of the sovereign from the commencement to the close of their career. They all therefore affected as much as possible a residence at court, where alone, indeed, they could readily meet with associates of their own rank in society.

If the evil had terminated with the episcopate itself, it might have been borne with as an inconvenience not absolutely intolerable. But through the prelates it passed to and pervaded a large part of the parochial clergy. The bishop, himself a noble, and the debtor of the king, of the minister, or of the reigning favourite, was also the chief dispenser of benefices within his own diocese. He chose his subordinates very much on the principle on which he had himself been chosen. His preference was almost invariably given to the noble and the rich over the ignoble and the poor candidates for preferment. Though for the most part a person of decorous habits, he was very seldom distinguished by any eminent piety or learning, and least of all

by a spirit of brave hostility to the criminal or frivolous fashions of the age. He selected for all the greater livings in his patronage men who in these respects sympathised with himself. And thus, if you look beyond the limits of the Benedictine monasteries and the Jesuit schools, you will seek in vain among the clergy of France, in the reign of Louis XV., for one man eminent either as a divine or as a minister animated by true apostolic zeal. Rollin the historian, Fleury the author of the Church History, and Bridaine the great preacher of those times, are hardly exceptions, for the first two were monastic men, and the third an unbeneficed itinerant.

The incumbents of all the smaller livings were persons of low degree, and generally of very defective education. They were the roturiers of the clerical order, little elevated above the people to whom they ministered, and forming in the Church a separate and depressed class. However vain the dreams of equality may be in the political commonwealth, it is one of the springs of life and health in the ecclesiastical state. I mean of course not an equality of rank nor of wealth, nor of consideration, but an equal eligibility, in fact as well as in theory, for these advantages, amongst all who possess the due qualifications for the right discharge of the higher sacerdotal offices. The system of Church patronage in France elevated the worst candidates, and excluded the best, though with little habitual regard to the fitness or unfitness of either.

The Concordat of Francis I. completely banished from the Gallican Church the old elective principle. Waiving all the questions of positive right which have been suggested in our own country by the recent schism in Scotland, I shall hazard nothing in saying that a Church in which the people have absolutely no voice at all in the choice of their ministers, will never have a very deep and secure hold on the affections of the laity. But the alienation of the people from such a Church will always be peculiarly active when the clergy are imposed

on their flocks by the secular government or their nominees ; and when, having been so imposed on them, the pastors possess an absolute and exclusive monopoly of all public religious ministrations. In such a state of things, it is impossible that the sacerdotal body should not degenerate into a caste, inflated with extravagant conceptions of their divine right, of their superiority to all other men, and of their title to pre-eminent advantages, secular as well as spiritual.

Thus you will observe in the cahiers which I have quoted, the most conclusive evidence that down to the very eve of the Revolution, and in the age of Voltaire, the French clergy were still asserting the pretensions of Innocent III., and were still holding the language of Hildebrand. Alarmed at the irreligion and dissoluteness of their age, they were invoking the prison and the scourge for the redress of evils, to be fitly encountered by no weapons but those of the sanctuary. When they stood aghast at the flood of irreligion, vice, and infidelity flowing from a thousand presses, instead of opposing to it the barriers of superior wit and learning and popular eloquence, they thought only of invoking an increased rigour of the penal law, impotent, and more than impotent, as that law had hitherto been for their defence. They dreamt of subjecting to ecclesiastical discipline a people who were breaking loose from all the restraints of law and order, and from every sentiment of reverence whether for divine or human authority. Conscious of the disaffection of a large part of their own body to the common cause, they persuaded themselves that the humbler clergy would still be satisfied to bow before the great ecclesiastical princes and seigneurs, if only those grandees should be interdicted from deserting their cures, and multiplying their benefices. They rebuked the misemployment of patronage without any apparent remembrance or consciousness of the fact, that it was precisely to such abuses that they themselves, so far

as they belonged to the higher clerical ranks, were indebted for their own position, rank, and power. And to diminish the abuse of patronage, they sought to accumulate still more patronage upon the very bishops by whom the abuses of which they complained had been perpetrated.

Nor is their seeming unconsciousness of the real danger surrounding them, nor their inability to devise any rational securities against it, the most remarkable characteristic of their complaints. France was ringing from sea to sea with the atrocities which Voltaire had just brought to light in the case of Calas, and in the continued persecutions of the Protestants. Unmoved by these dismal tidings the Gallican clergy alone stood aloof from the general feelings of society, and demanded the total prohibition of all forms of public worship except their own; in a tone as uncompromising as that in which the Cardinal of Lorraine had denounced the Calvinists before Catherine de Medici. While the Jesuits were in exile, and the *Encyclopædia* was in progress, they had the confidence to insist that the education of all the children of France should be delivered over exclusively to themselves; and when the Parliament of Paris had just returned in triumph from their exile, they thought it a good opportunity for demanding the surrender, by the members of that body, of their legitimate control over the spiritual tribunals. The French clergy of the 18th century were too little enlightened to discharge or to understand the arduous duties of the stations they held, and of the times in which they were living. The salt of the earth had lost its savour. The low ambition and frivolities of the Noblesse had penetrated deeply into the character of the higher sacerdotal order. The lower rank of that order partook still more largely in the turbid passions by which all the commonalty of France was agitated. Unable to discern the real spirit of the times, and unable to appreciate the real condition of the country, they were alike incapable of originating and of accepting any

effective measures of reform. In the centre of a diseased and universal activity, they were inert. In the midst of innovators who held nothing sacred, they had persuaded themselves of the stability of their prescriptive usages, powers, emoluments, and honours. They were altogether unlike the mendicant orders of old times, who, even in the land of their birth, stood aloof from all temporal concerns, devoting themselves to the spiritual care of mankind. They were not less unlike our own Anglican clergy, partakers in most of the interests, projects, and liabilities of their fellow countrymen. They were neither so detached from the commonwealth as to be beyond the reach of any disasters by which it might be visited; nor were they connected with the commonwealth so intimately as to sympathise with the general feelings and policy of the generation to which they belonged; nor were they so detached from the civil state as to be invulnerable in their own persons by the disasters by which the civil state might be overtaken. They had outlived their own commission. The world had shot ahead of them, leaving them burdened with a multitude of opinions which had become obsolete, and of designs which were no longer practicable. Many of them died as martyrs to the faith to which their lives had been devoted. Many of them abandoned it for a share in the advantages which the Revolution offered to the proselytes from the old to the new doctrines. And then the faithless world believed that the Church herself had fallen with her ministers, and that the loss of her vast wealth and dignities was an overwhelming and irreparable calamity. Experience has to a great extent refuted those anticipations. In the persons of those ministers it has inscribed on the page of history a new confirmation of that law of the divine providence which assigns to the teachers of mankind, and especially to their religious teachers, a responsibility, painful, arduous, and pre-eminent above that of other men—a responsibility which, according to their advance or decline in wisdom,



piety, and virtue, renders their fortunes a measure at one time of the advance, at another of the decline, of the national welfare — a responsibility which proposes to them at once the highest rewards and the most formidable penalties — a responsibility which teaches them and their disciples many grave lessons of humility in approaching the altar, and of zeal in the performance of the self sacrifices to be daily offered there.

Scarcely less solemn was the responsibility on which the Noblesse of France held the honours, the wealth, and the privileges with which in the middle of the 18th century they were still invested. I formerly laid before you a rapid sketch of the growth and decline of their order, a sketch which it would be easy to expand from the ordinary materials of the history of the early Capetien kings; but as my immediate object is only to show what was the influence of the absolute monarchy on the members of the second estate of the realm, my retrospect shall commence with him, to whom more than to any other man, that monarchy is indebted for its vital principles and organisation, its triumph, and decline, and overthrow. In the later days of Richelieu (for it is to him I refer) there was no longer any balance or equipoise between the three estates of the realm. The commonwealth had come to consist of an absolute sovereign, of a nobility entirely dependent on him, and of the Tiers Etat, who had forfeited not merely the living spirit, but even the outward forms, of independence. Perhaps, however, this subordination both of the aristocratic and of the popular powers to the royal authority might have been reconciled with a constitutional government like that of England, if either Henry IV. had lived twenty years longer, or if Richelieu had never lived at all. In Henry's reign the Noblesse were no longer formidable. They were for the most part zealously attached to the king, and ever ready to follow his standard, although

many of them had retreated from the capital and were living on their own estates, exercising over their neighbours the benignant authority of rank, and wealth, and superior education, and cherishing the spirit of freedom which the wars of religion had so long contributed to excite. From such an aristocracy a peerage like that of England, and a legislative chamber like that of our House of Lords, might possibly have been composed, if Henry had retained his life and Sully his authority. But on Henry's death there was a universal revolt against the government of the Queen Regent and of her son. The courtiers of Louis XIII. grasped for themselves, at the expense of the people at large, all the benefits which the deceased king and his bold and frugal minister had so resolutely withholden from them. The rural Noblesse were inveigled by one royal favourite after another into this unpatriotic contest, until at length Richelieu crushed with his irresistible hand all the cabals of the palace, and all the confederacies of the insurgents. His victory was won, not by the authority of justice, but by the strength of a ruthless and inflexible will. After sweeping from the scene all the ephemeral antagonists of his power, he inflicted on the Noblesse a final and irreparable blow. He deprived them of all their separate political existence, of all the public offices they had been accustomed to sustain, and of all their ancient power and influence in the state. He called into being the intendants, the sub-intendants, and the whole of that array of officers of the civil government to whom I formerly referred, and left to the nobility nothing but their titles and their swords.

When Richelieu sat down to write his political testament, the wreck of the French aristocracy was lying before him stranded and helpless. There are few things more curious than the discussion in which he there engages as to the use which might be made of his victory over the second estate of France. He especially inquires by what

means the patrician families, which he had at once subdued and despoiled, might be enabled to exist with some tolerable amount of dignity and of ease. First he declares it impossible to assign to them any of the high and lucrative offices which he had entrusted to the intendants and the other confidential servants of the Crown. Then he maintains that the nobles cannot be permitted to live by the oppression of the people, which, on the contrary, he says must be severely punished. Next he asserts the impossibility of maintaining them at the public expense, except in return for some equivalent public service. And finally he inquires what such services should be; and resolves his own question, by determining that they must be maintained either as churchmen or as soldiers. Some of them, he says, may have ecclesiastical benefices, and the rest must live by their swords. The common people, says the cardinal, were created to earn their living, not to defend their country. That is the appropriate duty of the nobles, and for the discharge of it let them be liberally rewarded.

In these meditations, the cardinal rather avows the difficulty than solves it. The Church, indeed, might, by arbitrary power, be degraded into a place of refuge for destitute noblemen, but this was hardly practicable with the army. Knights and gentlemen no longer formed the military array of the kingdom. • The royal troops were no longer feudal levies, but regularly trained mercenaries. They chiefly served not on horseback but on foot. It was a service in which little or nothing was to be gained, except by the commanders of armies, and in which the ruined Noblesse might find a speedy termination of their sufferings, but scarcely the means of a bare subsistence. Richelieu was utterly unable to repair the ruin which he had wrought.

Louis XIV. inherited the difficulties and adopted the policy of Richelieu with regard to the second estate of the

realm. It was essential to the completeness of his own absolute authority that all the powers of the noblesse should be extinct. But it was also essential to the gratification of his feelings as a king, that an order of men should be upheld and cherished whose presence, while it imparted dignity to his court, at once broke and measured the depth of the interval between the monarch and the roturier. In a spirit of contemptuous pity, he made them neither more nor less than his domestic servants. Dukes and counts were taught to contend for the honour of placing a dish on the royal table, and of delivering to their royal master the shirt with which he was to dress himself in the morning. These, and similar offices, they performed with incomparable address and zeal.

There were, indeed, individuals amongst that high-spirited and illustrious order, who struggled long and well against this debasing change from noblemen into servile courtiers, and against the enervating influences of Versailles. Some few of them still retained great ancestral wealth, and some a social and intellectual superiority which no one openly disputed. Among them were men of rare talents, of great experience in civil business, of literary taste and elegance, and of great military genius.

Still, the general estimation of the noblesse was gradually declining throughout the whole of the 18th century. As a body they had no political functions, and no serious pursuits. From one generation to another, their moral energies were continually becoming less. Luxury and indolence had taken the place of the nobler qualities of their forefathers—of their bodily and mental activity—of their lives of danger and of toil—of their rude independence—of their exclusive claims to the perils of war and to its glory—and of their free and confidential intercourse with their sovereign, as his comrades in the field, and his advisers in the council. In D'Argenson's account of the French government in the year 1736, occurs the

following passage, descriptive of the nobles of that day:—  
 “They retain,” he says, “no functions whatever, but that of commanding in the army. From that employment they derive a merely transitory power. Their demeanour, indeed, is highly dignified, and their chivalric decorations very splendid. They have a few places at court, which give them free access to the King, and which secure for them the jealousy of his ministers. Now and then a lucrative place is created for their benefit, at the expense of society at large. They have many opportunities of prejudicing their neighbours in the judgment of the King, but very rarely have it in their power to be of service to any one. They live in a constant routine of gambling and intrigue. Their prosperity is a hollow show, which falls to pieces at a touch. Their address is admirable. Their taste in conversation and in the fashions of the day is perfect. Some few have large estates, which they entirely neglect. Most of them are living under a load of debt, with a hearty contempt for the just claims of their creditors.”

The nobles whom D'Argenson thus scornfully depicts, have, I believe, generally been supposed to have been persons of illustrious birth, or ancient descent. This, however, is one of several popular misapprehensions respecting them. In the reign of Louis XV. there were as few families in France who could trace back a noble lineage to the times of Hugues Capet, as there are at this moment noble families in England who have an authentic genealogy commencing as early as the Norman Conquest. The descendants of the feudal lords had long since disappeared. They had fallen by the waste of war, to which they were far more exposed than any other class of society. The right of private war, so long in use among the French, had destroyed a large number of the privileged classes. They had contributed more victims to the Crusades than any other of the powers of Europe. Two centuries and a half of almost uninter-

rupted hostilities, foreign and domestic, beginning with the reign of Philip of Valois, and ending with the accession of Henry IV., had swept away many households the most eminent for hereditary rank and power; and in the campaigns of Richelieu and of Louis XIV. they had sustained most formidable losses.

. There is also a physical law which forbids the perpetuation in any country, by natural increase, of any small number of families who form a distinct social class, and who chiefly and habitually intermarry with each other. But in addition to the corrective of the pride of high birth involved in this natural condition of human existence, there is a corrective of such pride resulting from the conditions of human fortune. The baronial father of a numerous offspring, when sorely pressed to find the means for their advancement in life, was not seldom compelled to submit to the indignity of a *mésalliance*. Many a rich bourgeois was the father of well-portioned daughters, and coveted for himself and for them alliances which would give them admission into the highest society, and even a place in the magic circle at Versailles. Thus a union was contracted between patrician poverty and plebeian ambition. Yet it was very rarely that a noble woman accepted a roturier as her husband. A convent was generally considered by the young ladies of France, or at least by their parents, a happy escape from such a degradation. There was far less difficulty on the part of a nobleman in accepting an ignoble wife. The ground of this distinction was not altogether sentimental. There were many occasions on which a man of noble parentage had to give proof of the purity of his blood. Such were his reception at court, his admission to any of the higher commands in the army, or into any of the orders of knighthood. Now, in such investigation, there was no reference at all to the female ancestry of the candidate. Consequently a nobleman taking an ignoble wife would not impede the descent of

those advantages to his posterity. But a noble woman taking an ignoble husband, must submit to see her children and descendants, to the third and fourth generation, rated as ignoble, and incapable of competing for these distinctions.

Another misconception very frequently entertained respecting the noblesse of France in the 18th century is that to them, and to them alone, belonged all the noble lands, or as they were called the *terres titrées*, in that country. The seigneur of any such estate possessed various rights, especially those of the chase, which were regarded with an extreme, and a not unreasonable jealousy by the great body of the people ; and the members of the Second Estate of the realm incurred a great amount of exaggerated unpopularity by the opinion which identified their order exclusively with the possession and exercise of these invidious privileges. That opinion was, however, a prejudice. Before the reign of Louis XV. a very large proportion of the noble fiefs had passed into the hands of roturiers, and especially into those of the wealthier bourgeois. In France, as everywhere else, it had been found impossible to arrest, by positive laws, the impulses which urge men to render property of every kind exchangeable for money. In the rigour of the Feudal Dynasty, indeed, it had been supposed that all persons of ignoble birth might be permanently disqualified from purchasing noble fiefs. But the exigencies of mankind requiring the repeal of that law, the astuteness of the legal profession had found the means of abrogating it, without subjecting the Crown or the nobles to the pain of explicitly abandoning a time-honoured, though now barren principle. Partly by royal grants of exemption from the law itself, and partly by royal grants of nobility to the purchasers of the noble fiefs, a very large proportion of them had, in the 18th century, passed into the hands of seigneurs who were, or who had once been, merchants.

A not less frequent error is, to suppose that the whole, or nearly the whole, of France was holden in fief or seigneurie, so that the seigneurs or their tenants divided amongst them the greater part of the entire kingdom. From this very broad rule we must except first, nearly all the cities of France, and all the territories possessed by the citizens in their corporate character, and secondly, many most extensive parts of the kingdom in which the feudal tenures had never been established; and thirdly, many large estates holden of the Crown in what was called *Franc alleu*, or as we should say in England, in free and common soccage; and fourthly, the many holdings which had been enfranchised within the limits of particular seigneuries.

It would, however, be a serious mistake to infer from what I have said that the noblesse in the days of Louis XV. were an unimportant body in the state. Crushed, and impoverished, and debased as they were, they yet retained much wealth, and still more dignity. Highest in rank among them were the peers of France, lay and ecclesiastical. To that body belonged all the princes of the blood royal, with the archbishops and bishops of Rheims, of Laon, of Langres, of Beauvais, of Chalons-sur-Marne, of Noyon, and of Paris, — the archbishop of Paris being, however, a peer, not in right of that see, but in right of the Duchy St. Cloud, which was inseparably annexed to it. The spiritual peers held that rank only while they held their dioceses. But the lay peers were all hereditary. The king might increase their number at his pleasure, though they seldom exceeded forty. The effectual security against the prodigal multiplication of this high dignity, was the law, or custom, which required that the Duchy attached to the title should be the property of the Duke who bore it, and should be composed either of noble fiefs, or of *arriere fiefs* of great extent and value — a law or a custom, over the



observance of which the peers watched with the utmost jealousy.

The peerage carried with it not only eminent rank, but in one respect some substantial authority. Every peer was *ex officio* a member of all the parliaments of France. They would, however, have regarded themselves as degraded by sitting in any parliament excepting that of Paris; and even there they absented themselves during the judicial business of the court, taking their seats only when political questions were in debate.

I formerly explained how little real power was attached to any other of the ranks of nobility. The pecuniary benefits which a noble derived from his station, were his exemption from some fiscal burdens, and his competency to hold some high offices, military and civil, which were not open to plebeians. The social benefits of it were but an exaggeration of those which we may daily observe to be enjoyed by the members of the peerage in our own country, or by their children; a fair allowance being made for the differences of national manners, and for the progress of the democratic spirit in either country during the last hundred years. It may, however, be worth noticing that in England the heraldic distinctions of the nobility are drawn much more distinctly, and are insisted on more rigorously, than they ever were in France. There, as here, the duke preceded noblemen of every other class; but the degrees of dignity enjoyed by marquesses, counts, and barons were scarcely distinguishable. Thus, for example, Mirabeau always took the title of count, though he had inherited from his father that of marquess; and the head of the House of Montmorenci, though merely a baron, would have been received in society, and even at court, with greater observance than the most considerable duke who was not also a peer. In former times no man could assume the title of any fief of which he was not in fact the proprietor. But in the age of Louis XV., the severance

of the title from the estate had become habitual. No ignoble person, by purchasing a noble fief, became entitled to designate himself as its lord or seigneur. But any man, either of noble birth, or ennobled by the King, became the titular, as well as the real lord of any seigneurie which he might acquire.

The nobles were, in popular discourse, rather than with legal precision, divided into the two classes of the *Noblesse de l'Epée* and the *Noblesse de la Robe*. Yet the magistracy were not, accurately speaking, nobles. They did not usually assume any territorial title, but contented themselves with their family names, and with the illustration which those names derived from their high offices and position in the state. Thus L'Hôpital, Montesquieu, Molé, Malesherbes, Lamoignon, and many other of the most eminent magistrates of France, were always known by their patronymics, though some of them were men of illustrious lineage.

The nobles were divided among themselves by intestine jealousies. The *Noblesse de l'Epée* despised the *Noblesse de la Robe*. Their judicial profession, and the plebeian birth of most of them, were supposed to place them far below the gallant courtiers of Versailles; on the other hand, the lawyers in France, as everywhere else, gratified their self-esteem by contrasting the intellectual dignity of their calling with the mere animal prowess of their military rivals. There were discords also among the martial nobility. The *Noblesse de Cour* looked down with contempt on the *Noblesse de Province*, who in turn regarded them with envy and ill-will. Again, the *Noblesse* of a remote origin affected a profound scorn for the nobles of a more recent creation—a sentiment the more pardonable because even in the camp the commandants of battalions and of regiments (being invariably selected from the *Haute Noblesse*) were, on that account, exalted above all their brother officers; the majority of whom were nobles of inferior consideration.

In general, the manners of the Noblesse in the 18th century were exceedingly dissolute, and the prevailing tone of society amongst them was that of mockery at religion and virtue. Thus, for example, in turning over the letters of Voltaire to the Duc de Richelieu you will continually find him ascribing to the Duke habits to which, at the present day, no one would venture to allude in any of the salons of Paris, but which that all-accomplished flatterer invariably notices as the subject of compliment to his correspondent. We are not, indeed, to suppose that all the nobility of France were thus corrupt; but the whole body partook of the disgrace of its more eminent members. Vice was in different forms their supposed, if not their real, characteristic; and even the obscure imitators of their profligacy condemned without mercy the example which they were themselves following.

In the train of licentious self-indulgence came, as a matter of course, an undisguised selfishness. The noblesse appeared to regard their high station as a mere personal advantage divested of all responsibility to the commonwealth. They even affected to consider themselves as superior to the law. Sometimes they obtained from the Crown what were called *Arrets de Surseance*, that is Royal Writs protecting them against the claims of their creditors; and, sometimes, they violated the penal law with impunity, either beneath the shelter of a royal pardon, or from the reluctance of the inferior Ministers of Justice to provoke such formidable enemies, or from the connivance of functionaries of a higher rank in the offences of those from whom they had favours to solicit.

Amidst all their excesses the nobles had, however, maintained their martial spirit unimpaired. During a large part of the 18th century it found exercise, not against the enemies of France, but in private duels. Every effort had been made in vain by the Church and by the King to arrest the progress of this extravagance, but a

false sense of honour was too strong for the restraints either of religion or of law. To refuse a challenge was in effect to become infamous. The enactments on the subject were virtually repealed by a revolt of public opinion against them. From this responsibility not even the highest magistrates were entirely sheltered by the sacred privileges of the judicial office. In earlier times the honour of fighting duels had been reserved tenaciously for officers and gentlemen. But in the days of Louis XV. persons of much humbler degree asserted their right to participate in this hazardous advantage. The gradual rising of the tide of social and political equality was not more curiously marked by anything than the enlargement of the sphere within which the right of challenging and of being challenged was confined. For example, in the year 1773, Beaumarchais, himself a watch-maker and the son of a watch-maker, fought a series of duels, rather than a single duel, with the Duc de Chaulnes. The refusal of combats with roturiers, on account of their inferior rank, was one of the most bitter of the insults by which the nobility of France provoked the resentment of the commons.

It is impossible to state with much precision what was the actual number of the noblesse in the 18th century. The only distinct estimate which I have seen is thus formed. It is known that in Bretagne there were about two thousand noble families, which, supposing each family to consist of five persons, would give for the whole province a total population of ten thousand nobles. Now, as Bretagne comprised about an eleventh part of the entire population of France, it may, on this basis, be assumed that there were one hundred and ten thousand nobility in the whole kingdom.

No recapitulation of the history, and of the characteristic qualities of the French noblesse, can possess either the interest or the real value of those vivid portraitures of

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them which you meet at every page of the memoirs, dramas, novels, and romances of those times. Whoever reads St. Simon, Dangeau, Madame de Sevigné, Madame de Staël, the correspondence of Voltaire, the history of Duclos, or the comedies of Destouches, Gresset, or Piron, will find himself in the very centre of the aristocratic circle which once surrounded the Regent and Louis XV. I heartily wish that it was permitted to me, in this place, to substitute the living panorama of those authors for these cold historical generalisations. But though I must refuse that relief to you and to myself, I cannot but direct your notice to one of the comedies of Louis XV.'s time, as exhibiting the aristocratic character as it then existed, with a brilliancy of light and colour, a distinctness of outline, and a general harmony of tone, hardly, I think, to be found in any other of the similar portraitures of that age: I refer to the *Glorieux* of Destouches, the hero of which, a young French nobleman, is conducted through a series of ludicrous incidents, designed to bring out, into the most vivid light, the haughtiness and the insolence, the extravagance and the poverty, the licentiousness and the gallant spirit of his class. These faults of the hero of the drama are relieved by the wisdom which long adversity has imparted to his noble father, and by the wit and tenderness of the noble lady whom, with all his errors, he has contrived to fascinate. A darker picture of the same order, of men and women, has been drawn by Gresset, in his famous play called *Le Méchant*, where the reader is startled to meet, from the hands of a first-rate artist, the sketch of a nobleman so abandoned to ennui and to vice, and so destitute of respect for others or for himself, as to be even ostentatious of a malignity, which rejoices in wounding the peace of every one around him, for the simple pleasure of giving pain. And having wandered thus far from my proper limits, into these creations of the fancy, I am tempted to advance

yet a step further, and to recommend to your notice the *Métromanie* of Piron, — of Piron, the *Bête Noire* of Voltaire, — a comedy, for which French literature has, I think, no superior or model, except in Molière himself; and in which the relations between the noblesse, the court, and the men of letters of the age, are portrayed with an audacity by which Molière would have been terrified, and with a variety of resources, a breadth of humour, and a fertility of thought and illustration, of which I am not sure that even Molière has given any superior example.

But to appreciate more accurately, though far less agreeably, what was the real state of opinion among the noblesse in the 18th century, upon the questions more immediately affecting their own position in the state, I would refer you to those collections of the *Cahiers*, addressed to the deputies to the States General of 1789, which I have already mentioned. It is almost superfluous to say, that on that occasion, the nobles, like the clergy, took the opportunity of projecting a complete system of government in whatever related to the constitution of the kingdom, to the abstract principles of its internal polity, to the maxims of the penal and civil jurisprudence, to the administration of justice, of municipalities and of charities, to the education of the people, to finance, to agriculture, to commerce, to the army, and to the Church. Any assemblage of Frenchmen in those times, who had found themselves unprovided with a complete body of doctrines, and of practical conclusions, upon all or any of these matters, would have been scandalised at the penury of their own resources. They had all the intrepidity of ignorance and of self-admiration; and they were all, of course, liberals and innovators, for such was the fashion of the times. But when, from the remodelling of every other institution, they turned to the amendment of their own, their language and their projects acquired a greater significance, and better deserve attention.

They maintained then, that the French noblesse were a

body, one and indivisible ; that is, that the rights of them all rested on an immutable privilege, inherited from their ancestry; the particular titles of different nobles, and the ranks designated by those titles, being only so many internal, and comparatively unimportant distinctions, enjoyed, within this great aristocratic hierarchy, by particular families. They protested against the attempt to divide their corps into different classes, or to exclude any of them from any of those military commands to which every gentleman was summoned by his birth. They denounced as unjustifiable encroachments on the order at large, those advantages which had recently been accorded exclusively to the Noblesse de la Cour, and for which they were indebted to the circumstance of their having acquired certain hereditary offices, in attendance on the person of the King. They proposed that every person of noble family should be entitled to bear, on his or her person, some distinctive habiliment or decoration, such as a sash, a girdle, or a cross ; and that noble women should bear ornaments of that kind, indicating the military ranks of their husbands, or of their fathers. They requested that the nobles, and they only, should be authorised to appear in society with swords by their sides ; the sword being, they said, emblematic of courage and of honour, of which no one worthy of the position of a gentleman could be destitute. Any ignoble person, not being a soldier, was to be punished for presuming to carry arms. Still further to defend their order from the encroachments of the vulgar, they implored the enactment of a royal ordinance, forbidding any person to assume a name to which he was not entitled, and enacting that no gentleman should designate himself by any title to which he had not a valid hereditary right ; so that every Frenchman should be restrained within the proper limits of his rank and civil condition. The citizens in various towns within the municipal limits, having usurped the precedence really

due to the noblesse, they demanded that the noblesse should be authorised to take, in every part of the kingdom, the same relative station which belonged to them in the States General of France. They consented to renounce all their fiscal exemptions, but they insisted that the sacrifice should be rewarded by the maintenance of all their honorary distinctions, and by the effectual prohibition of every infringement or disregard of those distinctions, by any ignoble person whatever. In illustration of this demand, they especially referred to the exclusive right of a nobleman to have his mansion-house surrounded with as many as four acres of land to be employed as a court-yard and garden. Their renunciation of their fiscal immunities was not, however, to be considered as final. In some bailliages, at least, they stipulated for the right of resuming them, as soon as the diseases of the state should have been healed by the wise measures of the States General; and in the meantime they expected to be exempt from all personal obligations which would be inconsistent with their habitual presence in arms, whether in the camp or garrison.

The nobility had always regarded with especial ill will the admission of any persons into their order in consideration of money paid to the Crown. They, therefore, sought to deprive the King of this power. They were also jealous of the constant increase of their number, by the admission into it of every member of each sovereign court, and they required that this advantage should be confined to the first president of each tribunal. Many offices, though burdensome or useless to society at large, had hitherto imparted to the holders of them the privileges of noble birth, and the Cahiers of the Noblesse sought for the abrogation of this right. Persons officiating as secretaries to the King, having peculiar facilities for obtaining this advantage, ought, it was said, to be interdicted from availing themselves of their opportunities; and any accession to the existing list



of nobles was earnestly deprecated, unless when it might be made in favour of persons eminent for their public services, or distinguished by some extraordinary merits, moral or intellectual.

The better to fortify themselves against improper intrusions into their order, they solicited the establishment of an Heraldic Court, which should adjudicate on the pretensions of each person to serve either in their army, or in any other body in which proof of nobility was indispensable; and they demanded that the existing rule, which required that such proof should be carried back to the year 1400, should be amended by the substitution of some other date, to be approved by the King; and they proposed that every person laying claim to noble birth should immediately verify his pretensions before some tribunal, general or provincial, to be established for the purpose; and that false pretenders to nobility should be diligently sought out and properly punished.

But how did the noblesse of the 18th century propose to solve the problem which, as we have seen, had baffled Richelieu? They suggested the repeal of the laws which forbade the members of their order from engaging in honourable and lucrative professions. But they were much perplexed to determine what professions were honourable. No servile calling was to be so considered, nor any retail trade. But here again was the difficulty of exactly defining a retailer. Some called on the States General to define all these delicate distinctions by positive laws; and some were in favour of extending to the whole kingdom the law or custom of Bretagne, where a nobleman was allowed to let his dignity go to sleep, while he was earning money in any undignified pursuit, and to awaken and resume it, when he was rich enough to return to his original and more stately habits of life.

Some nobles, however, were incurably poor, and what was to be done for them? Some of their Cahiers recom-

mended a fixed pension list for their support; others suggested the maintenance, for their exclusive benefit, of military schools, of the College of Saint Cyr, and of other royal foundations. Some again pointed out the Commanderies of the Maltese Order as a resource; some the creation of Noble Chapters at the expence of the richer Abbeyes; and some recommended the foundation of a great Hotel, near Paris, for the reception of the noble paupers, and for training up their sons for the military service of the Crown. Others, with better judgment, desired that the States General would devise and adopt whatever measures they might think best adapted for delivering the kingdom from the disgrace, and the sufferers from the humiliation, of all this high born pauperism.

These details, though not otherwise of much interest, appear to me to be of great importance in enabling us to estimate on the highest possible authority what was the real condition and character of the Second Estate of the realm in France, within three generations, from the time when Louis XIV. had reigned over them. I will endeavour to bring into a narrow compass the conclusions which the preceding brief retrospect of the history and character of the Noblesse appear to me to establish:—

First, then, from the foundation to the overthrow of the French monarchy, the kingdom never ceased to labour under evils originally resulting from the imperfect consolidation of the state under the Gothic, Burgundian, Frankish, and other German conquerors. It first became rather a confederacy of rival princes than a single commonwealth—a confederacy held together by the idea or fiction of that age, that all lands, however extensive, and that all dominations, however independent, were held in fief, either immediately or mediately, of the supreme Suzerain. It was in that capacity alone, that Hugues Capet and his earlier descendants, either exercised or claimed any superiority of rank or of power over the Dukes and Counts who reigned beyond the limits

of the Royal Domain. It was in that capacity that the King, triumphing over one and another of his great Feudatories, added their dominions to his own. Those triumphs were won by the aid of the Commons, but for the benefit of the Crown. The subjugated feudal princes became an aristocracy who fought the battles, deliberated in the councils, and administered the delegated prerogatives of their monarch. No longer his rivals, or avowed antagonists, they became his favoured subjects, haughty, indeed, and turbulent, but rich, brave, and, above all other lay orders in the realm, formidable to the enemies and to the other subjects of the prince, and even to the prince himself. Having, by their aid, destroyed the popular franchises of his people, the King, especially in the 17th century, despoiled the noblesse themselves of all their political functions, in favour of the intendants, the sub-intendants, and the other official functionaries, whom Sully, Richelieu, Mazarin, Colbert, and Louis XIV., successively called into existence. From independent princes they had first become the civil and military rulers of the kingdom beneath the King. They had then degenerated into a vast privileged body, destitute of any public duties excepting those of war; an idle, arrogant, necessitous and unprofitable burden to the state; taught to consider all honest industry as discreditable, inflated with the traditions of a greatness which had for ever departed, regarding as essential to their dignity a splendour of living which they had no means of sustaining; and subsiding into courtiers, gamblers, parasites and state paupers, while the whole world around them was awakening into every form of new activity, intellectual, commercial and political. Their remote predecessors had been princes, their less distant progenitors warriors and administrators, they themselves, with some few brilliant exceptions, were but court menials, profligates, or idlers.

The heavy curse which hung upon the Second Estate of

the realm, in France, was the curse of being a superfluity, cumberers of the soil, contributing nothing to the state in return for the immunities they enjoyed, and the social distinctions of which they made their boast. The great mass of the people was alienated from them. Traditions, not very clearly understood, though substantially accurate, represented them as the heirs of those feudal lords who had once been the antagonists of the rights and franchises of the Commons. Their fiscal exemptions were a daily, a palpable, and an offensive evidence of the truth of those traditions. The Noblesse, collectively, were associated in the public mind with the insulting and oppressive feudal rights which belonged to the wealthier members of their body, although, indeed, those rights belonged not to the Noblesse only, but to every other owner of feudal estates in France. But, as all such landholders, however humble their birth, affected the manners, and were adorned, and often self-adorned, with the titles indicative of seigniorial rank, the Noblesse, properly so called, however poor, had to expiate the faults of their parvenu imitators.

For these and similar reasons, the nobility of France, in the 18th century, were not only isolated from the great body of the people, but had become the objects of contempt, and ridicule, and aversion. In England these dangers had been averted by those great principles of our constitution which have denied to rank, whether hereditary or acquired, any exemption from the burdens of the people at large, and which have inseparably attached to the highest rank amongst us, (that of the Peerage,) a share in the most arduous and important of all social duties,—that, namely, of legislation. If the peers of England had not met together as a House of Lords, they would scarcely have been existing at this moment as an order in the state. If that hereditary function had not of necessity excluded all the children of an English peer from the rank of their father, excepting only that child by whom he was to be succeeded, the English

nobility, like the French nobility under Louis XV., would now be counted not by scores but by myriads. If the younger children of the noble families amongst us had not found in the Commons House of Parliament, at the Bar, in the Church, in various branches of commerce, and in the naval, military, and civil services of the Crown, employments derogating nothing, either in their own opinion, or in the opinion of others, from their personal and ancestral dignity, the Commons of England might at this moment be regarding with contempt and hatred those whom we are justly accustomed to admire as constituting, in proportion to their numbers, the most able, the best instructed, the most patriotic, and certainly not the least attractive members of society.

As it was the calamity of the Noblesse in the later half of the 18th century to be at once dreaded, hated, and contemned by the people at large, so it was their misfortune to be almost wholly ignorant of the real state of public opinion at that time. Conceive of the whole body of these French nobility, when the ground on which they stood was rocking with the first throes of the approaching earthquake, gravely demanding, from the assembled representatives of the nation, laws to determine by what sashes and other ornaments their order should be distinguished in society — laws to unbuckle the sword from the court dress of every roturier — laws to confine them to their own plebeian names and to their right places at public fêtes — laws establishing heraldic courts — and laws narrowing the gardens and the court-yards of the ignoble! Think of those unhappy gentlemen, on the eve of their ruin and extinction, still stipulating for the possible revival of their fiscal privileges, and for the creation of pension lists for their own support, and for the erection of royal hospitals where they might live in indolence, untainted by the disgrace of earning their bread by the labour of their hands or of their minds!

That such an aristocracy should fall at the first contact with the resentment it had awakened, might have been confidently foretold by any one who had been accustomed to educe the laws of Providence from the history of the world. For every page of that history assures us that there is no stability for any human power except the sentiment of duty, of interest, or of affection in the minds of those who are to be governed—that no such feelings can ever be excited and maintained among the subject multitude on behalf of those who are avowedly living for no higher end than that of self-gratification—that to be self-isolated from the great body of the people is an offence which the people never forgive, and which they never allow to remain eventually unpunished—that to be ignorant of the real character, the pursuits, and the opinions of the generation to which they belong, is an error into which the rulers of mankind can never fall with impunity—and that to outrage public feeling by idle words and offensive manners, is to incur a danger far more formidable than usually attends upon the most audacious enterprises. The French Noblesse had not themselves learned from history any of these lessons which the history of their overthrow is so well calculated to teach to others.

It remains that I should attempt to trace out the effect which the institutions and the spirit of the Absolute Monarchy produced upon the great body of the people by whom France was inhabited in the latter half of the 18th century. But as far as the means of information to which I have access extend, I should conclude that there is extant but very little authentic information as to the real circumstances, and habits, and character of that great proportion of the Commons who, in that age, lived by the labour of their hands, and who were on that account distinguished from the rest of the people of France by the title of Roturiers. It is not, indeed, until a comparatively recent period that the state of that class of society in any part of the

world has attracted much of the notice of scientific, or even of popular writers. England, it is true, possessed in the 18th century many parliamentary reports throwing some light on the subject; and some poets, Crabbe and Goldsmith especially, who depicted their poorer fellow-countrymen in the most vivid colours; and some novelists, such as Sterne, Fielding, Smollett, Hannah More, and Maria Edgeworth, who have made us still more familiarly acquainted with them. But I have sought long and far, though without success, for any similar sources of intelligence respecting the people who were dwelling in the villages of France, or in the hiding places of the French cities, between the death of Louis XIV. and the monarchy. We have whole libraries devoted to the salons and to the literary and the political society of Paris, but scarcely a volume is to be found respecting the artisans of the faubourgs, or the cottagers of the provinces. Our inquiries respecting their actual condition must, therefore, I fear, be confined to the highways of history and of statistics, with scarcely a digression into any of the more picturesque by-paths of private life. Even M. Thierry's History of the Tiers Etat does not supply this omission, as it treats of the political, not of the social, history of that order.

By the words Tiers Etat, or Commons, is to be understood the whole population of the kingdom which was neither sacerdotal nor noble. They formed, probably, ninety-nine parts in a hundred of the king's subjects; but they were themselves subdivided into three principal classes—of the Bourgeois, the Artisans, and the Peasantry; and each of these subdivisions was again subdivided. Thus, among the Bourgeois were numbered both the wealthy citizen, and the rural proprietor living at ease upon his own fortune, and the magistrates of the inferior courts, and the advocates practising before them, and the men of letters, and the physicians, and the artists, and the petty shopkeepers, and the whole body of clerks attached

to public or private offices. The Artisans, again, were distinguished from each other by the various degrees of skill and refinement required in their respective callings. Among the Peasantry, also, rank was elevated above rank in proportion to the greater or the less exemption enjoyed by each from the feudal servitudes of those times. These differences between the several classes of commoners were almost innumerable, and though resting not on any positive law, but on public sentiment only, they were regarded as all-important. Thus the rich bourgeois would have thought his family degraded if his daughter had been given in marriage to a small shopkeeper. A man who made watches would have despised a matrimonial alliance with the daughter of a man who made shoes. A peasant labouring on his own account on lands holden in franc aleu would not willingly have betrothed his daughter to a peasant living in feudal dependence on his seigneur. And these susceptibilities (as the French express it) of the ignoble ranks were but so many imitations of the rivalries and jealousies of their superiors. French society at that time, to borrow a picturesque image from M. Droz, resembled nothing more than the great cascade at Versailles — a perennial stream of contempt dashing down from the highest social gradation in an unbroken succession to the lowest; every Frenchman being, at the same time, ambitious of equality with the grade above him, and jealous of his superiority to the grade below him.

Like most other epigrammatic forms of speech, the image of M. Droz aims rather at general truth than at minute exactness; for a commoner, whether bourgeois, artisan, or roturier, might emerge out of the degradation of his caste by genius, by wealth, by military exploits, or by great powers of pleasing in society. Thus Voltaire, though the son of a country attorney; and D'Alembert, though a foundling; and Marmontel, though the son of a peasant, became the companions of nobles and of



kings, and interchanged flatteries with them on equal terms. Thus, also, the great bankers, Samuel Bernard and John Law, were surrounded by subservient peers, were caressed by the Regent Duke of Orleans, and were honoured even by the stately Louis XIV. himself. And so, again, though in more remote times, Lesdiguières became the Constable of France, as, in later days, Villars became a French Marshal, though neither of them could boast one noble quartering on his shield; and, in the same spirit, the salons of Madame du Deffand and of Mademoiselle L'Epinasse were crowded by many men who talked so well that it was agreed on all hands to forget the meanness of their origin. And yet that oblivion was never perfect in favour even of genius, or wealth, or valour, or wit, and scarcely even in favour of female beauty. Indirectly, there was always passing something to remind the possessors of these advantages that they were enjoying a special privilege, and that their noble companions, when receiving them into their houses, were conscious of a generous and dignified condescension; for true social equality could never really flourish between the members of different orders in the state when those orders were separated from each other, as in France, by disparities, not of form merely, but of substance. Such disparities prevailed, not merely in the intercourse of private life, but at the court also, and in the civil service of the Crown, in the Army, in the Church, and in the Courts of Justice. Thus no commoner could hold any office which entitled the possessor of it to appear in the royal circle, or to be presented to the King at any public levee. He could not hold a commission in the Royal Guards, nor attain to the command of an army, a battalion, or a regiment. The military colleges were closed to him, as was the college of St. Cyr to his daughters. Without a noble genealogy of at least four descents, no Frenchman could become a Knight of Malta. All the higher diplomatic employments were reserved for the

Noblesse. The intendants were selected exclusively from the Noblesse de la Robe, and no one could be admitted into that legal hierarchy except with the consent of his future colleagues — a consent seldom given, except in favour of persons of noble birth, and never given for the advancement of men who possessed neither wealth nor influence. Even in the Church the commoner was depressed; for the bishops and greater abbots were almost invariably chosen from among the privileged orders. And although, as I have said, a more liberal spirit was sometimes exhibited in Parisian assemblies, yet the commoner was invariably excluded from the private circle of the rural seigneur with all the severity of provincial haughtiness.

A Bourgeois, who had consulted his reason rather than his imagination or his feelings, would perhaps have regarded the depression of his class in the social scale with composure, if not with actual satisfaction, when he weighed their compensatory advantages. For the bourgeoisie had an exclusive possession of the whole trade of France, except indeed in Bretagne, where, strangely enough, was still surviving, after so many centuries, the more healthful sentiment of the island from which their forefathers had migrated. A Breton nobleman was quite as ready to enrich himself by trade as if he had been born in Bristol or in London. But in the rest of the kingdom it was otherwise; and although a law of Louis XIV. authorised the Noblesse to engage in the haute-commerce without prejudice to their rank, none availed themselves of the indulgence. The Noblesse had also abandoned to the Commons, as unbefitting their own dignity, all except the highest places in the administration of justice and in the civil service of the Crown. The bourgeoisie had, moreover, an exclusive possession of all the inferior offices and preferments in the Church. They alone engaged in the medical profession, nor did any advocate of noble birth appear in the tribunals. Thus the Bar and the

Pulpit, those two great instruments of authority in a land where the press was not free, were occupied wholly by men of ignoble origin. Even the great office of intendant was not altogether beyond their reach, since the intendants were chosen from the Noblesse de la Robe, the vacancies in whose ranks were sometimes supplied by the elevation of members of the Tiers Etat. But with these substantial advantages the commoners were not satisfied. The wounds inflicted on their vanity, indeed on their honest self-esteem, were incurable. The whole literature of the times attests the universality of their habit of envying, reproaching, and deriding their lordly superiors. And yet, no one declined an opportunity of rising to the class which he so depreciated. All thought it better to be envied than to envy. To attach to themselves the distinction due to their superiors, not a few assumed noble titles, and appeared in a borrowed plumage, which, when worn by its rightful owners, they had affected to despise.

There was an easy passage in France from wealth to nobility. In the days of Louis XV. there were no less than 4,000 vendible public offices there, each of which ennobled the holder of it. The greater number of them, indeed, conferred that advantage only on the purchaser himself; but there were many of them so considerable and so costly, that the purchaser transmitted his acquired nobility to the third generation of his descendants. The honours thus bought with money did not, however, sit with much grace or ease on the purchasers of them. The order into which they had intruded received them with unequivocal antipathy. The order from which they had emerged regarded their elevation with undisguised ill will. They affronted at once their new and their old colleagues; and their patents of nobility, won not by steel but by gold, acquired the sobriquet of the rogues' washing ball—"savonnette à vilains."

The depression under which that part of the commonalty of France laboured, which was composed of Artisans, was

neither so readily escaped nor so much mitigated as that of the Bourgeois. In all the cities of the kingdom the artisans were formed into companies ; each company was composed of masters and apprentices. No man could work on his own account unless he were a master, and no apprentice could be admitted to that degree except by the concurrence of the existing masters of his Company. The masters were of course not much disposed to increase the number of their own competitors ; and, to enhance the difficulty of obtaining admission into their fraternity, they charged heavy fees on every such act. To these were added high duties to the Crown ; and such was the amount of the joint charges as effectually to exclude from what was called the *Maitrise*, all the workmen who had not already made some considerable savings. This kind of communism, devised originally with a view to revenue, to police, and to the encouragement of trade, had thus given birth to a deplorable servitude. Within the cities in which they dwelt the masters enjoyed a virtual monopoly of the purchase and sale of the articles in which they traded, and the apprentices were doomed to lives of continued dependence on them.

Yet, as this bondage had been devised by the members of the trade itself, and had long been maintained as a supposed benefit of the entire guild, the sufferings it occasioned had been borne with patience, until advancing knowledge revealed to the workmen that they were the victims of a tyranny the more grievous because it falsely assumed the character of a boon. In the reign of Louis XV. this discovery gave birth to a schism between the apprentices and their employers, which gradually diffused itself through almost every part of the kingdom.

The condition of the Peasantry, or actual cultivators of the soil of France, is less distinctly recorded even than that of the other two classes of the *Tiers Etat*. That minute subdivision of the land which we are accustomed to regard

as one of the consequences of the Revolution, had, in fact, long preceded it. In the reign of Louis XV. all estates were either noble or ignoble; that is, they were all either exempt from the *taille*, or subject to it. If noble, they passed from the ancestor to the descendant, according to the law of primogeniture. If ignoble, they were equally divided among all the children of the deceased proprietor. Such ignoble lands were to be found in every part of the kingdom, but especially in Quercy, Languedoc, the whole district of the Pyrenees, Béarn, Gascony, part of Guienne, Alsace, Flanders, and Lorraine.

About a sixth or a seventh of the surface of France was occupied by tenants holding their lands at a money rent. This practice prevailed in Picardy, Artois, part of Flanders, nearly all of Normandy, and in the Isle of France.

There were to be found in every part of the kingdom lands holden on feudal tenure; that is, lands granted by the lords of seigneuries under the reservation of fines, quit-rents, forfeitures, and other services. Such fiefs abounded especially in Bretagne, in the Limousin, in Berri, and in La Marche.

A very large proportion of the whole kingdom was cultivated on what was called the *Mettayer* system. In this case the landholder and the tenant were in effect partners; the landlord finding some definite part of the cattle, the seed, and the implements of husbandry to be employed on the estate, and some specific part of the taxes payable in respect of it; the tenant supplying the rest of those articles and taxes, and contributing the whole of the labour to be employed on the soil. The produce of the farm was eventually divided between them. There was, of course, an infinite diversity in the terms of such contracts, the one principle common to them all being that of managing the farm by stock resulting from the contribution of both parties on condition that the produce

should be divided between them. Sometimes a large extent of land was hired at a money rent from the owner, and then sub-let by the lessee or middleman to metayers.

In general, all farms, whether held as independent properties, or for a money rent, or on feudal tenures, or by mettayer, were of very small extent; although in Picardy, in the Isle of France, in the Pay de Bauge, in Artois, and in Normandy, the holdings were occasionally large.

The occupiers of land on money rents were by far the most prosperous part of the peasantry of old France. The metairie system at once attested and enhanced the poverty of those who pursued it. It originated in the heavy pressure on the farmers of the *taille*, and the other taxes from which the privileged orders were exempt. As the *taille* was increased in proportion to the estimated ability of the landholder, it was in fact a tax on industry, thrift, and success. It kept the contributors to it poor, or induced them to affect poverty. It was dangerous to exhibit to the collector of the *taille* the evidence of any increase of wealth. The more wretched the appearance of the estate, the lower were the demands of the tax-gatherer. The metairie partnership was a diminution or division of the risk thus incident to the investment of capital on such lands as were subject to that impost. But such partnerships were more advantageously, and therefore more readily formed, for the culture of lands exempt from it. The *taille* thus tended to the abandonment or impoverishment of particular districts in favour of others; and it attracted to those favoured districts, and to the lands of strangers, the labour and the small capitals which the actual cultivators would otherwise have laid out in their own districts and on their own lands.

The smallness of the independent holdings contributed also much to the poverty of the farmers of them. Forty or fifty acres may not be incapable of good and profitable husbandry; but, by repeated divisions and

subdivisions, numerous families in France were attached to patches not exceeding a rood or half a rood; and the result was to create a population in many parts of the kingdom scarcely less wretched than that of Ireland or of China.

Among the vexations to which the peasantry of France were exposed a hundred years ago, a very prominent place was given to what were called the Capitaineries. By this term is to be understood the right of the chase, which the king was accustomed to grant to princes of the blood royal. It made them the proprietors of all game even on lands belonging to other persons. There were in France about four hundred square leagues of country devoted to this purpose. They were fenced in by no enclosures, and from them proceeded over the whole adjacent country wild boars, and deer, and other game in search of subsistence, which animals, however, might not be killed except at the risk of the most serious penalties. In aid of this offensive monopoly were laws forbidding weeding and hoeing, lest the partridges should be disturbed; or the use of any manure injurious to their flavour; or the premature mowing down of any hay or stubble which might be requisite for their shelter.

The contempt expressed by these oppressive laws exasperated the sufferers even more than the loss which they inflicted on them. In the cahiers addressed to their deputies in the States General of 1789, the Tiers Etat demanded, with no little vehemence, the redress of the wrongs thus inflicted on them by members of the royal house. But in those documents they complained, with still greater energy, of the wrongs they suffered from the seigneurs under whom they lived.

Thus, they denounced the administration of justice in the seigniorial courts as combining every form of despotism. They complained of the indefiniteness of the local limits of the jurisdiction of those tribunals. They described

the appeals from their judgments as endless. They arraigned their forms of procedure as fomenting litigation, as favouring every kind of chicane, and as ruining the suitors by an enormous waste both of money and of time. They described the seigniorial judges as "ignorant pretenders who held their courts in cabarets," and as living in an absolute dependence on the seigneurs by whom they were appointed and at whose pleasure they were removable from office.

Of the seigneurs themselves, and of their oppressions, the cahiers spoke in the most indignant terms. They described the feudal lords as the "greatest scourge of the people," as "exercising a disastrous rule, and reducing them to a deplorable bondage," and they demanded the immediate and utter abolition of their powers. Descending from general denunciations, they produced a long catalogue of particular grievances. Among these were the exaction of fixed and heavy rents, — vexatious processes for enforcing the payment of them, — arbitrary valuations for the increase of them, — rents "solidaires and revenchables," — rents "cheantes and levantes," — "fumages," — fines on every change of the property in the direct as well as in the collateral line, — the lord's power of repurchasing any fief after his sale of it, — the extravagant fines on every sale, — the forfeitures injurious in their origin, but still more oppressive in their extension, — the obligation of employing the mill, the oven, the wine, and the cider press of the lord, and no other, — corvées by custom, — corvées by usage of the fief, — corvées established by unjust sentences, — corvées arbitrary and even fantastical, — servitudes extravagant and burdensome, — payments in kind, — collections by assessments which admitted of no equal or intelligible distribution, — "litigations ruinous and without end," — the "rod of seigniorial finance for ever shaken over their heads," — in fine, they said, "a destructive slavery under which the peasants, reduced almost to the level of Polish slaves, can never be otherwise than miserable, and



vile, and oppressed." To these grievances they added a list of the various obligations due by the feudal tenant to his lord. It would be to no purpose to repeat it; for, to myself at least, very few of the terms employed appear either translatable or intelligible. What, for example, may have been due from the tenant under the head of "fishes leap," of "dreams," of the "portage of eggs in a cart," and of a multitude of other such liabilities, is known, I suppose, but to very few modern Frenchmen. In the list I perceive, however, one feudal burden, the meaning of which I chance to understand. It is the "*silence des grenouilles*;" that is, the obligation of the tenantry in marshy districts to keep the frogs silent, by beating the waters when the wife of the seigneur was in labour, that she might not be disturbed by their croaking.

Now, doubtless, here is a long enumeration of offensive and substantial grievances. Does it justify the inference that the rural population of France in the 18th century were really a much depressed, a long suffering, and an unhappy people? Such is, I think, the popular belief. Such is certainly the conclusion inculcated by a large proportion of the popular writers of that country. Among them I may particularly notice M. Monteil, who in the year 1844 published a history of all ranks of Frenchmen in the 18th century. From what sources the writer's facts are drawn he unfortunately nowhere explains; and it is still more unfortunate, that instead of exhibiting them in any of the more ordinary forms of composition, he tells his story in a series of dialogues so sportive and epigrammatic that the precise meaning continually evaporates, or disappears under the dramatic exigencies of the task he has undertaken. Yet as Monteil is a writer of authority and repute, I will extract from his ninth volume the following account of a visit which he supposes himself to make to a French village in the reign of Louis XV.

"On reaching the avenue," he says, "I approach some

villagers, and have the following dialogue with them:—  
‘My friends, who is the owner of this great sheet of water?’ ‘It’s the lord’s pool.’ ‘And these weirs, and the nets stretched along them?’ ‘It’s my lord’s wild duck decoy.’ ‘Why, my friend, here are four or five hundred pigeons foraging on all your growing corn!’ ‘We may not disturb them; they belong to my lord’s dovecot.’ ‘What splendid large farms you have here, surrounded by vast fields and meadows; there must be some wealthy owners in these parts?’ ‘They are all my lord’s farms, sir.’  
Next turning down the bridle-road, and peeping behind the palings so freshly painted and gilded, and along the road so skilfully twisted and sanded, I see, all of a sudden, a château, like a clump of elegant pavilions, with a number of embroidered livery servants lounging here and there. ‘Walk in, sir; walk in!’ exclaimed the villagers; ‘you will see how beautiful and rich everything is there. Even the kitchen utensils are all of solid silver.’ ‘Admirable! but who is the haughty personage who passed us just now without condescending to take the least notice of the bow I made to him. Of course he is the lord?’ ‘Oh, no! far worse man than he. It’s my lord’s man of business. If you stay here, you’ll continually see him in the village with a book under his arm, where he has put down what each of us owes, or has to pay. You will hear him calling to one and another of us, “Where are you going in such a hurry? You have not paid your rent. Your quit-rent is in arrear. You owe me a fowl; you half a fowl; you a quarter of a fowl; you a sous; you half a sous; you as much more. Ah! you vagabonds; I am heartily sorry that my lord would not allow me to buy a Malacca cane for your service! If you provoke me, I’ll send for the notary, and you’ll have to pay the expense of a handsome court-roll which he will draw up for you. The gaol has been lately repaired, and the stocks we have just set up were not, as the saying is, built for the dogs.”’

“On a sudden there is a shout, ‘Here’s my lord! my lord!’ Everybody’s hat’s off in a moment, just as when one hears them cry, ‘The king! the king!’ at Versailles. The dinner-bell rings immediately; and my lord, having heard that a well-dressed man has just alighted near his gate, courteously invites me in. I accept the invitation. We have an excellent dinner; and when that is over, some read the gazette, some sit down to the harpsichord, some go out to shoot, some to fish, some make love, and some yawn. Now just such,” concludes M. Monteil, “were the forty thousand and odd châteaux in France when Louis XV. was reigning there.”

If this lively picture is a mere fancy sketch, it is good for nothing. If it is drawn from any authentic sources, it is good for just as much as they verify; but how much or how little that is, must be a mere matter of conjecture, for no authorities are either quoted or referred to. But, be it an imaginary or an historical sketch, it is, at least, a very remarkable exhibition of the opinions prevailing in France, in the middle of the 19th century, as to the state of the great body of the French people in the middle of the 18th. To what extent may it be accepted as a trustworthy account of the condition of society to which it refers?

No one, probably, will now deny or doubt that the feudal obligations on which land was holden in France were eminently injudicious and absurd. But it is another and a more difficult question, how far they diminished the comforts or affected the tranquillity of life. To infer the actual condition of any people from the mere text and letter of the law to which they were subject, is a vain and a hopeless attempt. There is, and will always be, a wide interval between the extreme rights vested either in the state or in individuals, and the degree and manner in which such rights are actually enforced in the ordinary course and habits of life. The facility is truly marvellous with which

harsh laws are either evaded or reconciled to the feelings of those who are constrained to yield obedience to them ; and notwithstanding the pathetic eloquence with which the cahiers of 1789 denounced the whole system of feudal tenures, there are, I think, strong reasons to doubt whether they directly and immediately inflicted any intolerable wrongs on the French people.

For, first, the proportion of the whole kingdom which was held in fief and seigneurie was not, after all, very considerable. I know of no authority by which that proportion has been ascertained. But so great was the extent of land of which the actual cultivators were not feudal tenants, but metayers, that Arthur Young, after most extensive inquiries, concluded that seven-eighths of the whole territory of France under tillage was occupied in that manner. In the Isle of France, and generally throughout a circle of several leagues diameter, of which Paris was the centre, farms were almost universally tenanted as leaseholds for money rents. Feudality, therefore, however noxious it may have been, did not operate over a very wide surface. I do not mean that the feudal principles had a narrow operation, but merely that the incidents of that particular tenure affected the lands to a far less extent than is usually supposed. The distinction of estates as ignoble or noble, and the consequent liability, or non-liability, of the occupiers of them to the taille, was a consequence not of the relation in which the occupier stood to the lord of the soil, but of the difference between the relations in which the ignoble and the noble classes stood to the king himself, regarded as the sovereign and supreme head of the state.

I am the rather incredulous about the magnitude of the distress induced by the feudal tenure, from observing that some of the most vexatious incidents of it were scarcely, if at all, more vexatious than those which have so long attached to a large part of the copyhold lands

of England. The copyholder, in a multitude of cases, pays large alienation fines, and large fines for renewals on the death of his direct ancestors, and has sometimes to lament the seizure by the lord of the manor, as a heriot, of the best horse in his deceased father's stables, or of the best threshing-machine in his barn. Improvident customs, no doubt, towards the gradual abolition of which we are now rapidly advancing, but customs which the most enthusiastic reformer has never denounced as embittering the lives of those who hold lands among us by copy of court roll. Those laws among ourselves have rather retarded the general advance of society, than impaired the peace of individuals, or the solace of private life.

If one were required to point out the happiest and the most prosperous people on the face of the globe, I believe that any competent judge would award that distinction to the French Censitaires settled on the seigneuries of Lower Canada. This testimony in their favour is given without a dissentient voice by every traveller who has resided much among them, and by every Englishman who has ever administered the government over them; yet in Lower Canada the old feudal tenures of France are in force at this moment; and so keen is the attachment of the tenantry to them, that, after living awhile under the law of England, they eagerly and successfully demanded the restoration of the customs of their forefathers, and still continue to repel, with enthusiastic energy, the attempts of their English fellow colonists to Anglicise the conditions on which their lands are holden. There are, I admit, good reasons why, in a thinly-settled and democratic province in America, feudal obligations should press less severely on the censitaire than in the old aristocratic kingdom of France; but still I am slow to believe, that the very institutions which are at present the delight of the one people, were, a hundred years ago, the wretchedness of the other.

I suppose it to be a fact perfectly ascertained that the steady increase, during successive generations, of the numbers of any people, negatives the supposition of any wide-spread misery among them, and induces a high probability that they have been at least enjoying an abundance of the material comforts and resources of life. Now, tried by this test, we must judge favourably of the state of the poorer classes in France during the 18th century. In the year 1700 the intendants of France compiled an official census which exhibited a population of about twenty millions of souls. Ninety years later the National Assembly directed another census, from which it resulted that the people then numbered about twenty-six millions and a half. But there is every reason to believe that, in either case, the result was considerably below the truth. There was everywhere a direct motive to understate it, because the demands of the government for men and money in each locality were in proportion to the estimated number of the inhabitants. When this motive for concealment had ceased to operate, a census, taken with the utmost possible exactness, in 1841, gave a return of nearly thirty-four millions and a quarter as the population of the whole kingdom. Now it is impossible that there should really have been an increase of more than seven millions in the population of France between 1790 and 1841. I believe, therefore, that we may safely defer to the conclusions adopted by MM. Raudot and Fayel, the latest writers on the subject, who concur in the conclusion that France contained at least thirty millions of souls at the time of the Revolution, and had therefore been making a rapid and steady increase from the commencement of the century. But if this be so, it will follow that the feudal tenures of land in that age had been found compatible with a great and progressive enlargement of the means of subsistence throughout all the provinces of the kingdom, and that consequently those tenures

were not very oppressive or burdensome to the people at large.

Mr. Arthur Young's travels through France during the year 1787, and in the two following years, is a book not only of great authority, but of very singular authority respecting the cultivation, wealth, and resources of that great country. He traversed it in every direction, carrying with him a fund of rural and agricultural knowledge such as very few men could then boast, and an acquaintance, still less common at that period, with the relations between rural and political economy. I have inquired diligently, but without success, for any other writer in the 18th century who made any similar survey of France, or who has left behind him any corresponding delineation of the state of her manufactures or of her peasantry. Mr. Young's book is not very attractive, but it has the evident stamp of great ardour in his pursuit, of unremitting diligence in his researches, and of his profound sincerity in reporting the results of them. He writes as an enthusiast in the cause of the Revolution, the commencement of which he witnessed, and as a stern antagonist of the privileged orders, against whom he rails with a genuine English antipathy to every form of arrogance and oppression. The general result of his investigations is to show that towards the close of the 18th century agriculture was ill understood in France, and still more wretchedly practised — a conclusion, I believe, not very widely different from that which a well-informed agricultural traveller over the same regions would form in the present day. Mr. Young further found in all the abodes of the common people in France, a degree of uncleanness which he attempts in vain to describe. All the resources of his mother tongue are exhausted in a desperate endeavour to convey to his English readers some distinct conception of the unutterable reality. But I do not perceive that he found, though assuredly he was predisposed to find, a people dragging out

a listless or dissatisfied existence, without sufficient food, clothing, or shelter. He describes a very ill-governed and unsavoury race, but leaves on the minds of his readers no impression that want was pinching their bodies, or that the iron had entered into their souls. He was apparently a man of an ardent and genial temper, prompt to sympathise both with the pleasures and the pains of those among whom he lived; and his silence about any widespread suffering is on that account the more significant. He was an English gentleman well acquainted with Ireland, and when much provoked with the dirt and other annoyances he encounters in his French travels will sometimes even hazard the hyperbole that things look no better than on the banks of the Shannon; but he always gives you to understand that this is a kind of pleasant extravagance.

And, further, the consentient testimonies of all men, living in those times, about the characteristic qualities of the French people forbid the belief that their lot was hard to bear, or that it was, in fact, borne with any habitual disquietude or dejection. It was chiefly in the 18th century that they gained that reputation for gaiety of heart and elasticity of spirits to which, in our own times, they have comparatively so little claim. But it was then nothing less than proverbial; and the adventures of Sterne at Montreuil, and those of Goldsmith on the Loire, were imagined in deference to the universal expectation of their readers that every French lacquey should be as brilliant as the serving men in the Spanish comedy, and that every French peasant should dance and sing like a shepherd in Arcadia. Perhaps there is not much in this; yet it is hardly credible that all Europe should have assigned the palm of pre-eminent cheerfulness and vivacity to a nation for which the European world had but little favour or affection, if, indeed, misery and discontent had been generally diffused among any large portion of them.



Finally. I remember one, though I confess not more than one, authentic and vivid illustration of the truth of the common delineation of the French peasant and his family in the reign of Louis XV., as living habitually in a state of placid cheerfulness and self-enjoyment. Marmontel was born in that rank of life, and in his memoirs you will find a very amiable and graphic portrait of his own education, and of his father's household. The youth had been bred up in one of those multitude of provincial schools or colleges to which a boy of promising parts was often sent by his parish priest to receive a gratuitous instruction in classical and theological learning. When he returned from his tutors to his home, he enjoyed, and has left behind him a description of the festivities of the village, and tells us how he himself became an important and much admired personage in the whole system of village politics. Marmontel, indeed, did not become his own biographer until he had acquired so much skill and brilliancy of colouring as a story-teller, that it is difficult to repose absolute confidence in the accuracy of the narrative of his early days. Yet there can be no reason to doubt that it was a scene sketched from the life, or that it was one of many scenes the substantial truth of which would be recognised by every one familiar with rural life in France, and which collectively attested that the French cottage in the 18th century was not seldom an abode on which the dwellers in palaces might have looked with envy.

For these reasons I believe that the old feudal tenures of France, however great their absurdity, were compatible with the enjoyment, by the feudal tenantry, of many of the best comforts of life. I do not, however, deny or doubt that they were the source of many national evils and of many personal wrongs. But the injustice, and the consequent disaffection, seem to me to have originated, not in the conditions on which lands in fief and seigneurie

were held, so much as in the feudal spirit of which those conditions were but one among many proofs—a spirit pervading the whole system of life, and affecting all the relations of society. The inconvenient and vexatious tenures on which land were granted to the censitaires in a comparatively small part of France, could not have been the real cause of any general revolt against all the ancient institutions of the monarchy. Discontents so widely spread, and so deeply seated, must have sprung from roots which had penetrated much further into the national mind. The traditions which to this moment render feudality hateful to every Frenchman must have sprung from evils more intolerable than any which the Tiers Etat specified in their cahiers.

If we had not become so familiar with the use of the words “feudal” and “feudalism,” as terms of reproach against the government of France in the 18th century, we might well be surprised that either the expressions, or the things they signified, should have been remembered at all at so late an era. The feudal system, considered as a code of law, was subverted by the papal despotism of the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries, and by the crusades which the popes encouraged. During the wars between the houses of Valois and Plantagenet, and the wars of religion, nearly the whole of the old feudal nobility were destroyed. The Reformation called into existence new habits of mind and new social relations, with which the ancient alliance of the suzerain and his feudatories was incompatible. Henry IV. consequently substituted the modern system of governing by ministers, for the ancient practice of governing by territorial lords. Richelieu laid the basis of the French despotism, in the concentration of all the powers of the state in the hands of the king and of his great officers. Louis XIV., in the plenitude of that power, chose those officers almost exclusively from bourgeois families ennobled by himself. By what strange vitality,

then, did the maxims and sentiments of the feudal times survive the repeal of so much of the feudal code, — the extinction of so many of the great seigniorial houses, — and the annihilation of all the powers, political and military, which those houses had originally enjoyed?

The answer is, that every king of France, from Louis IX. to Louis XV., replaced the old feudal lordships by the creation of new seigneuries and of a new Noblesse. Patents of nobility were profusely granted, sometimes for money, and sometimes from still more unworthy motives; and the dukes, counts, and barons, who had fought under Philippe Auguste or Charles VII., were represented under the later Bourbons by *novi homines* bearing the same or similar titles, although sprung from ignoble ancestors. It was not desired, nor would it have been possible, to transfer to these nobles of recent creation the sovereign rights which the great feudatories had exercised under the ancient Capetien monarchs; but it was found possible, as unhappily it was judged wise, to retain for them the old seigniorial rights over the roturier, and the old seigniorial distinctions over the whole commonalty of France. When divorced from all ancestral dignity, those rights and distinctions became in the highest degree offensive to those over whom they were asserted, as, on the other hand, they were cherished with the keenest jealousy by those on whom they had been conferred. There were about 110,000 persons, dispersed throughout all the provinces and cities of France, to whom alone it belonged to approach the Crown, to hold high commands in the army, to sit in the supreme tribunals of the realm, to occupy the high offices in the state, to exact from their tenants burdensome and offensive services, to assume a high social rank, and to escape, in virtue of that rank, the degrading and heavy fiscal burdens to which their fellow subjects were liable. If they had all been Montmorencis, or Bethunes, or Rohans, or Tremouilles, their pre-eminence and immunities might

have been patiently endured; but it was not in the nature of man, and especially not of Frenchmen, to acquiesce in such an elevation of an aristocracy who had neither hereditary nor personal claims to the respect of the people at large. When the kings of France erected their absolute throne on the ruins of the feudal system, and yet, with a view to their own greatness, and for the aggrandisement of their own nominees, perpetuated the offensive forms and the haughty spirit of that system, they were preparing the way for the overthrow of their own dynasty. They were enlisting the wounded self-love of the Commons on the side of innovation and revolt, and were but anticipating the time when the myriads of the privileged Noblesse should be hurried into a fatal encounter with the millions of the unprivileged people.

Nor must we suppose that the grievances which the Tiers Etat attributed to feudality were those of wounded self-importance, or of imagination merely. The grievance of the feudal tenures, though operating over a narrower surface than is usually supposed, was doubtless a grave incommodity to those who endured it. The taille, the gabelle, and the corvée were flagrant wrongs, felt throughout a great part of France as at once a heavy burden and a degrading badge of inferiority. The Capetieneries might seem to have been designed to insult as well as to despoil all who lived in their vicinity. The seigniorial courts of justice, although not very numerous, were yet, so far as they existed, an insulting avowal that justice itself must abdicate her dominion in favour of the interests of a few favourites of fortune. The lettres de cachet, under which noble families rescued themselves from disgrace, by the imprisonment of their offending kinsmen, under the royal authority and without any form of trial, were justly regarded by the people at large as the systematic sacrifice of a great principle of law to the selfish pride of a few distinguished houses. And, although but little trained to feel that the

whole commonwealth is injured by any wrong done to the feeblest of its members, the French of the 18th century had learnt that the seclusion in convents of young ladies of noble birth, to rescue their parents from the charge of their maintenance, or from the risk of a *mésalliance*, was an outrage at once on humanity, on religion, and on law.

Christianity (with profound reverence be it spoken) is after all the great leveller; recognising, indeed, the distinctions which obtain between different orders of men, but yet constantly presenting to the mind other distinctions which reduce all inequalities of secular rank to an inappreciable insignificance. Now, in the reigns of the later Bourbons, Feudality carried her haughty pretensions into the bosom of the Church herself. Scarcely a bishop or one of the greater abbots in those times attained to that rank except in virtue of his noble birth and connections, and scarcely one person, so born or connected, served in the humbler offices of *curé* or of vicar in the rural parishes. There the ministrations of the Church were, with few exceptions, performed by men born in cottages, and bred there until, in consequence of some peculiar aptitude for the sacerdotal office, they were selected for a higher education in some neighbouring college. These depressed teachers deeply sympathised with the feelings of their flocks, and did little, as they probably attempted little, to check the rising sense of indignation against the privileged orders.

Nor were there wanting other teachers in France to cherish and to stimulate those feelings. There were philosophers like Montesquieu, himself a noble, but directing first the ridicule, and then the serious researches of society against the class to which he belonged. And there were wits like Voltaire, a plebeian by birth, but a feudal lord by purchase, directing his suicidal merriment against the institutions which sheltered his hardly earned and much

valued rank and opulence. And there were sophisters like Rousseau, whose one delight it was to impart to others his own morose antipathy to all whom birth or fortune had assigned the high places of the earth. And there were dramatists like Destouches, Piron, Gresset, and Beaumarchais, who drew together countless audiences to laugh no longer at the Bourgeois Gentilhomme, but at the gentilhomme boasting his Frankish ancestry, his influence at court, his profligate amours, or his seigniorial privileges. Nor were there wanting graver doctors, the political economists of the age, subtle analysts of the sources of national wealth, who demonstrated how much those privileges contributed to dry those sources up and to cherish and to promote that system of farming *en metairie* which at once attested and perpetuated the poverty both of the owner of the land and of the cultivator of it. Travellers also arrived from a land till then little known in France, though lying on the north-western shores of the Channel, from whom Frenchmen learned to compare the serfdom of their own peasantry with the freedom of the English husbandman, and the frivolous insignificance of the French noble with the energy of the English lord, whether exhibited in law making, or in farming, or in horse racing. The Frenchman of Louis XV.'s reign consequently affected the *Anglomanie*, sometimes wrapt up in a long mantle as one who meditates, and sometimes with a cap and spurs like one impatient for the chase, but always open-eyed, or, at least, open-mouthed to the aristocratic abuses of his own country.

Thus, therefore, I believe not only that the commonalty of France, in the time of Louis XV., were labouring under many serious grievances, but also that they felt them very acutely. Among those grievances I believe feudality to have been one of the most considerable, not so much because the incidents of the feudal tenures of land were oppressive and burdensome, as because society was still

under the bondage of ideas which, though belonging to an age long since passed away, were yet exercising a mighty influence over the men of that later generation. The feudal system had been the natural product of the barbarous times in which it appeared, and was well adapted to them. Though cruel and unjust, it was a vigorous and self-consistent polity. The lowest fief being united by a long chain of mutual dependencies to the throne of the supreme suzerain, the seigneur permitted no one but himself to oppress his feudatories; and even the serf found a shelter from oppression in that military array from which he was excluded. Homage, fealty, clanship, jealousy for the honour of their lords, and a profound sense of their inherent and rightful superiority, reconciled the liegemen to this stern rule, and sometimes taught them even to exult in it. The broad distinction of rank between the noble and ignoble was but the natural and legitimate consequence of the distinctions between the functions, civil and political, to which they were respectively called. But when the living spirit of feudalism was flown, the ancient form became not only profitless but hateful. There was not any place for allegiance, loyalty, reverence, or gratitude on the side of the subject many, when there was no longer either ancestral rank, or great achievements, or protection, or beneficence, or any real or presumable moral superiority, on the side of the dominant few. One man was a roturier and the other a noble, simply because, in the lottery of life, the one had drawn a blank and the other a prize. Such distinctions might be referred by the devout to the secret decrees of the Divine Providence; though even that belief would but ineffectually mitigate the resentment provoked by the elevation of the worthless or the mean. But to the great mass of society the pre-eminence of such persons appeared merely as an intolerable injustice. That sense of the equality of all men in the presence of their Creator, and of the equal rights of all in

the presence of the law, which so often slumbers in the human mind; but which can never be wholly extinguished there, awoke about the middle of the reign of Louis XV., never again to be silenced or subdued amongst his people.

The intention which I expressed at the commencement of this lecture, of laying before you a brief statement of the results of the absolute monarchy on the condition of the people of France, would seem to require that I should say something regarding the general state of literature, of philosophy, of art, of manners, and of morals amongst them at the period when that monarchy, having reached its culminating point, was inclining towards its fall. But to what purpose traverse the ground which has been already so completely occupied by Barante, Villemain, and a host of other modern French writers, on the subject of the literature, the science, and the fine arts of France, in the earlier half of the 18th century? I renounce so superfluous an enterprise, and will confine myself to a brief notice of the manners and morals of that degenerate age, of which also, indeed, so much has already been written, though by authors of a lower rank than these, and with purposes far less elevated. Even this may perhaps appear to some of you as an undertaking irrelevant to my main design of delineating the growth and the development of the absolute monarchy. I would answer, that imperfectly as that design may have been accomplished in all other respects, it would reach a conclusion altogether unsatisfactory, if I did not make some attempt to trace the connection between the subversion of the political franchises of the kingdom, and the injuries inflicted on the national character. In fact our solicitude about political rights, interests, and duties would be extravagant, or unmeaning, if there were not an intimate and indissoluble connection between these and the public and private virtues and charities of life. If those virtues and charities expanded with equal, or with nearly equal vigour



under the shelter of free and of despotic institutions, it seems to me that such a despotism, as was that of the Bourbons in France, would be evidently preferable to our own free institutions. So immense is the price which, in many different forms, we are continually paying for our constitutional freedom, that, if it did not bring those inestimable blessings in its train, the purchase would, in my own judgment at least, be an improvident one.

I have already observed that no chapter in the history of nations has been so imperfectly written as that which relates to the state, whether physical or moral, of the great mass of society,—of those vast multitudes who, from age to age, have earned their living by the obscure but ceaseless labour of their hands. In proof of this, I can refer to no more remarkable fact than that in that celebrated chapter of his history, which depicts the state of England in the 17th century, Mr. Macaulay has not been able to assign more than a very few lines to his description of the husbandmen, the peasantry, the artisans, and the mechanics of our own country in those times. He has attempted only to infer the condition of the subordinate many, from what he has discovered of the condition of the predominant few; an inference not to be drawn without extreme caution, but which, when so drawn, may often conduct us to some trustworthy and valuable results.

The materials for such a survey of the higher classes in France, in the reign of Louis XV., are less copious than in almost any other period of the French history. The contemporary French memoirs of those times are both less abundant, less authentic, and less picturesque, than at any time since the accession of Louis XI. The chief of them are the Journals of Barbier; the Memoirs of the Marshal Duke of Richelieu, and of Du Clos; the various unpublished documents of which Dulaure has made such ample use in his History of Paris; the Letters of Voltaire and Grimm; the Persian Letters of Montesquieu; and the

Memoirs of Marmontel. From these collectively may be gathered a sufficiently distinct picture of the court and the capital during the first half of the 18th century. Of the interior administration of the government, during the earlier part of that era, St. Simon is at once the memorialist and the historian.

In the history of civilised nations, a more dismal spectacle is scarcely to be seen. Hypocrisy had reigned at Paris under Louis XIV. as it had reigned in London under Cromwell. But the religion of the rulers of the English Commonwealth was at the greatest possible distance from hypocrisy. It was as genuine as it was ardent. No one doubted the piety of Vane, Ludlow, or Hutchinson, any more than the piety of Milton, Howe, or Baxter; and the jovial spirits who were to hold such high revelry on the Restoration, were abashed and overawed into an external decorum during the Protectorate. But the religion of the rulers of France under the great king was regarded by every one as a heartless ceremonial. His courtiers submitted sullenly and grudgingly to the religious restraints and observances which, after his own secret marriage, he imposed on them. They were imposed by a monarch whose whole life had been, and still continued to be, an outrage on all the principles of Christianity. As Fénelon had told the king that his religion was not the love of God, but the fear of hell, so might Fénelon have told the courtiers of Louis that their religion was not even the fear of hell, but simply the fear of the king. No sooner did he close his eyes on the world than they threw off their masks. It was a day of jubilee with them. From the penance of attending at the daily celebration of the mass, they betook themselves to an equally assiduous attendance at the supper table of the Regent Duke of Orleans, or of his daughter, the Duchess of Berri. At the head of the society which assembled there, was Dubois, who having been one of the tutors of the regent

in his youth, had become the associate and adviser of his more mature years. "It is the strange distinction of Dubois to have been the object of the abhorrence, whether real or affected, of those whom all the rest of the world were uniting to abhor. The regent and the Duc de Richelieu, though generally regarded as prodigies of immorality, rivalled each other in denouncing the guilt and the baseness of Dubois. Yet he was a member of the French Academy, the first minister of France, the archbishop of Cambray, a cardinal of the Holy See, and, withal, the habitual president of the regent's supper table. Of his conduct in the last of those capacities it would be impossible to speak plainly without speaking indecorously. Suffice it to say, on the authority of the Duc de Richelieu, that after one of those festivities, the regent, awakening for a while from his sensual delirium, exclaimed, "What will history say of me! These orgies will be compared to those of Henry III. and his Mignons. The veil which now conceals these scenes will be drawn. The world will know all about them. There will be pictures and engravings of them. Well; it will at least be known that it all passed in the presence of a cardinal, and under his management." And then, turning fiercely to Dubois, he exclaimed, "Dog of a cardinal, get you hence; begone!"

Under the administration of Fleury these scandals were arrested; but they were revived in the mature manhood of Louis XV., who converted his court into a Turkish seraglio; except, indeed, that no one has ever attributed to the Grand Seignior such a combination of impurity, perfidy, intemperance, and abandonment of all kingly duties, as is usually laid to the charge of the Most Christian King. If any faith be due to the records which have come down to us, Louis drew out his languid existence the helpless victim of ennui and lassitude, except during the brief intervals in which his sated appetites, acquiring some transient invigoration, became susceptible of renewed indulgence.

This excess of depravity seems at first to have shocked and disgusted the other classes of society. But the contagion rapidly diffused itself. Every form of licentious and polluted imagery becoming associated in men's minds with the ideas of rank, of splendour, and of supreme authority, the illusion that there really existed some natural congruity between them, insinuated itself into men's minds in every direction. In all places of public resort, and in not a few domestic circles, the debaucheries of the Palais Royale, of the Luxemburg, and of Versailles, became first the subject of animated description, then of a transient indignation, then of a prurient curiosity, then of much unseemly jesting, and at length of a lamentable imitation. The court was unconsciously corrupting multitudes of whose names and existence it was unaware. The Noblesse, and, to a great extent, the commonalty of Paris, were distinguished and disgraced by a combination of dissoluteness, of enervating luxury, of gambling, of cruelty, of fanaticism, of hardness of heart, and of effeminate levity, such as seldom, if ever, met together to the same extent in any other great civic population. This has the sound of a severe and prejudiced indictment of a whole people. But, in fact, I am only repeating the language of many of the most learned of modern Frenchmen, and of such of them as are the most jealous of the glory of their native land. It is a charge but too easily verified.

Of the impurity of manners which prevailed at that period in Paris, it is indeed impossible that, in this presence, I should adduce any proofs; not because they are far to seek or hard to find, but for other and obvious reasons. But of the other melancholy characteristics of those times, the proofs and illustrations may be more inoffensively adduced. Thus, for example, the ruinous luxury and self-indulgence of the age exhibited itself in the structure and embellishment of the aristocratic mansions of the capital. The domestic architecture of the

times of Louis XIV. had been formed on the model of the royal palaces. The chambers of a private house, though cold and comfortless, were spacious, majestic, and on every side pervious to the light. Under the regent their dimensions were contracted. The light of day was as far as possible excluded. The ponderous furniture, and the tapestries of former times, gave place to ornaments of a slighter but more costly character, and to sculpture and paintings such as the matrons of a more decorous generation would have banished indignantly from their walls. On furniture of this kind princely fortunes were expended. So rich and so numerous, for example, were the ornaments of the private residence of Madame de Pompadour, that during the whole year which immediately succeeded her death, to attend at the sale of them became the daily occupation and the fashionable amusement of the Parisian ladies. There were in Paris several hotels in each of which the number of domestic servants exceeded a hundred, nor was it unusual for the owner of such a mansion to maintain an equal number of horses for pleasure or ostentation. It was the fashion of those days to give the most sumptuous entertainments. One eminent banker appropriated annually as much as 8000*l.* sterling to the charges of his dinner table. Barbier is everywhere the zealous and vigilant, though unintentional, witness to the vast importance which was then attached to the successful conduct of this department of a great household. If he records the promotion of a magistrate to the high dignities of First President, or Keeper of the Seals, or Chancellor, he immediately proceeds to debate with himself the question, how far the new office will be able to defray the expense of the dinners which it will be his duty to give. Or does he recount the exile of the whole magistracy to Pontoise? He dwells with infinite complacency on the mitigation of punishment, for which they were indebted to the courtesy of the incensed but not implacable

king, who had directed the fish-carts to stop in their way from the coast to the capital, that the judicial table might be regularly supplied with a fresh supply of that indispensable article.

The excitement of gaming was also enjoyed in what was then regarded as the highest perfection. Astounding as were the gains and the losses at games of hazard in the reign of Louis XIV., the players in the royal or noble salons of his earlier days had at least the merit of entering audaciously into the lists with fortune. They ruined themselves, or their opponents, indeed ; but while taking leave of the more vulgar virtues, they usually valued themselves on the nice observance of the laws of honour. But under the regent and Louis XV. grandees of the highest rank, dukes and peers, and even princes of the blood royal, were not ashamed to become keepers of gaming houses, and to open their hotels to all who were disposed to play against the bank, of which the noble host was himself the keeper. On this subject, the moral sense of all ranks had been debased by the stockjobbing under the system of Law. Men could not perceive the turpitude of transferring to their own dwellings the maxims and the example of the Rue Quincampoix.

Satiated by the ordinary forms of amusement, that dissipated age could no longer take interest in the comedy of Molière, or the royal ballets in which poetry and music imparted a certain dignity even to the dance ; but converted the theatres into vast ball-rooms, where all the dancers assembled in masks, and where the regent, and afterwards the king himself, might occasionally be distinguished among the maskers. The scandals to which these assemblages gave occasion, are a part of that impure chronicle which, as I have already said, I cannot venture to unroll. Yet there is one passage in Barbier's account of them, too significant of the moral sentiments of the time to be omitted. Louis XV. had absented himself from the

solemn observances of Easter. It was rightly conjectured that his confessor had refused to administer to him the Holy Communion, because he was living in the habitual commission of the mortal sin of adultery. The following is Barbier's remark on the occasion. "We are," says he, "on such good terms with the Pope at present, that the eldest son of the Church ought surely to have an indulgence from his Holiness for keeping Easter, without impiety and with a good conscience, let his habits be what they may."

To all this self-indulgence was added (it is no strange combination) an almost equal insensibility to the sufferings of others. Duellists met together, not to escape the contempt of society, or as a mode (however absurd) of vindicating their injured honour, but with an eager thirst for slaughter. Nothing can be more preposterous than the quarrels in which they drew the sword, and nothing more ferocious than their use of it. In mid-day, in the centre of the Rue Richelieu, and in the sight of all passers by, one officer of the Royal Guard was slain; in one of these combats, by another of those officers, his own comrade. The Comte de Rantzau was in the same manner slain, near the Luxemburg, by the Duc de Crussol — an event on which the parliament issued an *arrêt*, enjoining the duke to go to prison. It is needless to say, that he preferred remaining at large. He was tried as contumacious, and having expended sixty thousand livres in hiring witnesses, was acquitted. The following is Barbier's comment on the trial:—"It seems to me very strange that the Duke should have had to pay the witnesses so much for their services."

But while thus indulgent to the great, the Parliament of Paris distinguished themselves by a still more shameful rigour towards the defenceless and the poor. In the year 1750, two criminals were burnt to death in the Place de Grève. Twelve years later, Desmoulins, the leader of a

band of robbers, was broken on the wheel in the same place. He passed twenty-two hours in those frightful torments. "During the night," says Barbier, "they changed his confessors, for it was very cold standing on the scaffold. Ledit Sieur Desmoulins," he adds, "frequently drank water and suffered much. At length, perceiving that he would not die, and that the affair was becoming tiresome, the lieutenant-criminel asked the magistrates' permission to have him strangled, which was accordingly done this morning between nine and ten o'clock, otherwise he might perhaps be living still."

M. Barbier's threnody on Desmoulins, frigid and phlegmatic as it may sound, is nevertheless more pathetic than that with which the spectators of such scenes usually greeted the last moments of a criminal. When the fatal sentence was executed by what was called *decollation*, the executioner held up the bleeding head to the multitude, demanding and receiving their applause if the operation had been neatly and dexterously performed. On such occasions the windows of the Grève were crowded, and the square itself contained many carriages. "Ladies," as a poet of the time declares, "who would have wept over the death of a butterfly, thronged together to see Comte Lally lose his head." But of all these evidences of the union of hard hearts with enervated minds, the most marvellous is the case of Cartouche, the celebrated brigand of the age. Cartouche had been condemned to be broken on the wheel. Le Grand, a dramatist of the time, had written a play of which Cartouche was the hero. He was to be personated on the stage by an actor of the name of Quinault. Day by day the author and the actor repaired to Cartouche's prison, to rehearse the play before him! By the order of the magistrates, Cartouche himself and his accomplices attended these rehearsals, and criticised both the composition and the acting! The play was performed at the very hour when the criminal was actually



undergoing the agonies of the wheel. From the theatrical Cartouche the spectators proceeded to the place of execution to gaze on the real and agonising culprit. Hawkers then went about the streets offering for sale copies at once of the sentence and of the play. "I bought," says Barbier, "a copy of each, which I still keep as a memorial and a proof *des sottises de mes contemporaires*." Such a remark from a very decent and judicious personage (as men were then esteemed) is yet more illustrative of the state of manners and of moral sentiment in his age than even such a story.

But the age was not less distinguished by a wild fanaticism than by this strange hardheartedness. In the days of Louis XIV., Jansenism had been the doctrine of Pascal and Racine and Arnauld, and Nicole and De Saci and St. Cyran, than whom France has few more illustrious sons, and of Angélique and Agnes Arnauld, than whom she boasts no daughters more wise, or beneficent, or holy. In that age the Jansenists, and they alone, had the courage to confront at once the papal despotism and the royal tyranny. They were, I believe, amongst the most admirable members of the Church Universal; but they had embraced principles which they did not dare to follow to their legitimate Protestant conclusions, and they had embraced conclusions which they were afraid to trace up to their true Catholic principles. In the reign of Louis XV., the Jansenists had consequently degenerated from the dignity of their original position and character, into a fanaticism as hateful and as mean as ever disgraced the Christian name.

By a logic altogether incomprehensible to Protestant minds, it was inferred, even by Pascal himself, that a miracle wrought within the precincts of Port Royal was a divine attestation to the truth of the doctrines of the Port Royalists. Little wonder, therefore, if later Jansenists maintained that a multitude of miracles wrought at the

tomb of the Abbé Paris, demonstrated the truth of Jansenism and the untruth of the Bull Unigenitus by which Jansenism had been condemned. Such evidences were of course multiplied in proportion to the contempt and incredulity they provoked. There appeared a sect of Thaumaturgists, called Convulsionnaires. They were chiefly women, and young women. In that unhappy age, licentious thoughts and feelings infected and debased everything, so that even the alleged miracles are to a great extent totally unfit for description. But some of them are merely extravagant. Thus, no sword or other weapon, however keen of edge, or with whatever force it might be wielded, could, as it was believed, inflict a wound on the subjects of this preternatural influence. Of these, some (if we will give credit to their advocate and historian, M. De Montgeron) stretched themselves before a blazing fire, and remained there, at the distance of not six inches, for as long a time as it would have taken to roast a joint of meat. Some stood by a fire till apples hanging from their necks were actually roasted. On some of them numerous pieces of rock, of not less than twenty pounds weight, fell from a great height innocuously. One of them was brought back from the very gates of death to life by swallowing a glass of water into which some earth gathered at the abbé's tomb had been thrown; and this, though apparently the least astounding miracle of all, is in fact the most memorable, because Voltaire himself, then an obscure young man, was solemnly examined before a royal commission as a witness in proof of it. But there were yet other marvels more scandalous than any I have mentioned. There can be no doubt of the fact, that among the devotees of the Abbé Paris, several actually underwent a voluntary crucifixion; and that one at least of the persons present at such a scene, a poet and dramatist of some renown, actually died of the horror and distress of that appalling spectacle. The people of France in that day, celebrated as they were

for hilarity, produced a series of self-immolations at once more shocking, more absurd, and it must be added more impure, than any which stains the history of fanaticism in any other land, Christian or Mahometan.

And yet with these atrocities were combined manners so frivolous as to indicate an almost total loss of self-respect in those who adopted and in those who countenanced them. In the fashionable salons were to be seen military officers working embroideries, and abbés singing unseemly songs to the sound of their own guitars. Songs were indeed the great organs of public opinion. If the king changed his mistress, or if Cardinal Fleury had an apoplectic seizure, or if a French army perished in Bohemia, the chansons did for France what at this moment the leading article of the newspaper does for England. The artist who at that period invented dancing dolls gave a new aspect to society. The toy passed from the nursery into the hands of adult men, of solemn physicians, and of still more solemn magistrates, who exhibited Pantin (such was the name of the Parisian Ponchinello) not only in their own social circles, but in the public promenades. A war of epigrams between these dignified showmen and the wits of the city, provided the inhabitants with a subject of unceasing interest at the period in which the Empress Queen and the King of Prussia were contending for the dominion of Silesia.

It may seem idle to notice the puerilities of dress which distinguished that frivolous society. Yet they are not without a real significance, and Montesquieu himself has transmitted to us a pleasant description of them. I will not attempt to borrow his picture of the female costume, for I doubt whether I have skill enough to translate it, or whether you would understand me, if I had. But in the male attire of those days there were things not unworthy of a more serious notice. For example, men of fashion wore hoops in imitation of the ladies, having however in-

variably a rapier by the side in immediate contact with this strange ornament. The coat was covered with stars, spangles, and flowers, and men embellished their cheeks with paint and patches. The catalogue of these effeminate habits might be easily lengthened; but, to any one who has pondered the relations which subsist between the character of men and their habitual costume, and the cause of those relations, what I have already said will be enough to throw some light on the national character of Frenchmen, or at least of the Parisian Frenchmen, in the middle of the 18th century. Especially he will not be surprised to learn, that these Sybarites in dress were patrons of a literature compared to the knowledge of which an absolute ignorance of the arts of reading and writing would have been an inestimable felicity. The most scandalous of the rhymers and the novelists of the reign of Louis XVI., are celebrated, by those who have qualified themselves to make that deplorable comparison, as models of purity when contrasted with the writers who ministered to the depraved taste of the preceding generation.

It was not, however, in the manners of the capital alone that the prevailing degeneracy might be traced. It was not less perceptible in the organisation of the army, of the police, and of the executive government. Thus a royal ordinance of the year 1726 had provided for a species of military conscription, but the measure was defeated by the selfishness of a large proportion of the classes whom it more immediately affected. Claims of exemption were successfully made, not merely by the Noblesse, but on behalf of all wholesale merchants, farmers, agricultural labourers, advocates, revenue officers, members of civic corporations, and many others — exemptions extending to their sons as well as to themselves. It thus became necessary to recruit the army by voluntary enlistment. The non-commissioned officers employed in this service charged the colonel of the regiment about thirty livres a head for

each recruit, and the colonel sold the recruits over again to the king. He also became creditor upon the royal treasury for the food and dress which he supplied to the troops under his command. The profits of the colonel on these transactions were enormous; but it was a point of honour that he should expend them all in entertaining his officers, or on his own equipage. The luxury of the camp thus rivalled that of the city; and to support this prodigal expenditure, the officers sometimes authorised their men to smuggle salt, and other contraband goods, in substitution for their pay, which had been withheld to defray the expense of the regimental mess, spectacles, and gaming tables. So relaxed had become the discipline of the army, that Barbier tells us of a frolic in which the Marquis de Gaudelus, the colonel of one French regiment encamped near Metz, conducted his men in an attack on another French regiment in the same quarters, in order to capture their colours. In the conflict that ensued ten or twelve soldiers were slain. The marquis was punished by a reprimand for his folly, but was left in the command of his regiment.

The police of the city partook of all the disorder and insubordination of the camp. The sanguinary insurrections of the sections of Paris, in 1793, were foreshadowed by similar disturbances sixty years earlier. In the year 1725, a baker, in the Faubourg St. Antoine, raised the price of his bread. The people, rising en masse, pillaged all the bakers in that quarter, emptied their sacks of flour in the kennel, and destroyed all their furniture. The insurgents then constituted themselves commissaries for provisioning the city, and, having established a maximum price of bread, and a minimum rate of wages, proceeded to enforce obedience to their edicts by the summary and capital punishment of all who contravened them. When any judge had the hardihood to issue an arrêt distasteful to these tribunes of the people, his house was invaded and pillaged.

The police, unable to subdue the insurgents, entered into disgraceful compromises with them. An unhappy subaltern of that force was delivered up to the mob as a victim to appease their fury, and was immediately torn in pieces. To defy and assault the police became a fashionable amusement. The public fêtes could no longer be celebrated with safety or decorum. In the year 1745 a multitude of persons were wounded at such an entertainment; and "during eight days afterwards," says Barbier, "nothing was talked of but the successive deaths of persons, either seigneurs or bourgeois, who perished of the pressure or the heat." Not even the persons of the royal family were, in those days, safe from gross indignities; and the funeral of the eldest daughter of the king himself was celebrated with enormous outrages on his feelings, on public decency, and on the sacred shrine in which she was interred.

It is, however, scarcely possible to condemn the wild revenge which the people thus took upon their rulers, for never were the duties of a government more shamefully betrayed. As early as the year 1725, Louis XV. appears to have entered into the first of those extraordinary agreements to which I have already referred, and which acquired the name of Famine Contracts. The king employed a body of confidential agents to buy up corn throughout the provinces of France. The purchases were made with the public money, but on the private account, and for the personal benefit, of the king himself. The corn, being stored in granaries hired for the purpose, was sold in Paris at a vast profit whenever the markets of the capital rose; and the royal corn-factor had ample opportunities for raising them. His policy as a king thus became subservient to his interest as a merchant. The ministers of the Crown became partners in this traffic; and, after it had been continued nearly fifty years, an officer, with the title of "Grain Keeper on the King's

account," appeared in the Royal Almanac or Red Book of France, in the list of the members of the king's household. The announcement was ridiculed as a capital blunder by many, and was resented as an intolerable insult by a few. Among them was a M. de Beaumont, who had the courage to compile from the public offices a complete account of these transactions, and to meditate the publication of them. For this audacity he was punished by an imprisonment of twenty-two years, and, but for the Revolution, would have died a prisoner.

In justice to Louis XV. it should, however, be remembered that at the commencement of this system he was but a boy, under the tutelage of the Duke de Bourbon, and that the dissolute men and women who formed the associates of his more mature years kept him in ignorance of the extent of the calamities which he was inflicting on his oppressed subjects. They were, however, woes grievous and hard to be borne. During the sixty-four years of the continuance of the famine contracts, France was afflicted with no less than eleven destructive famines, which, if not all occasioned, were at least all aggravated, by the combination in the same person of the powers of a sovereign with the character of a forestaller of the corn markets of his kingdom. For although we are all now agreed that they who buy up corn in cheap markets, in order to sell it afterwards at an enhanced price, are the real, though, it may be, the unintentional, benefactors of society, yet I suppose that the most devoted zealot of free trade would refuse this freedom of forestalling to a king, who, in the transaction, hazarded the public money for the benefit of his own privy purse, and who, as a legislator, an administrator, or a belligerent, could so shape his measures as to depress the markets in which he meant to buy, and as to elevate those in which he desired to sell.

These topics are not to my taste, nor will I pursue them farther. I shall indeed have already pursued them too

far, if I shall have induced any of you to suppose that the French have not as high a claim on your admiration and esteem as any other people. There is no nation (at least I know of none) against which an arraignment might not be drawn up in colours as dark as I have now employed, if it were contemplated only in some particular point of view, and at some unhappy era, to be selected for that purpose. The picture which I have been laying before you is drawn from those classes of society, and from those localities, with which the absolute government was brought into a direct and habitual contact. Beyond the reach of that polluting influence, and without the range of the observation of historians, memoir writers, philosophers, dramatists, and novelists, were cottages and chateaux innumerable, where, even in the age of Louis XV., millions were cultivating the characteristic virtues of that gay and gallant race. The impetuous courage with which their forefathers had encountered every form of danger in defence of their fatherland, was still glowing in their bosoms. To that land they still clung with all the passionate ardour of true filial love. Bonds indissoluble for life, or for death, still held together in the closest union the various families of which that vast commonwealth was composed. They continued to welcome the blessings of life with a gladness and thankfulness of heart peculiar to themselves, and to accept the troubles of life with a fortitude not elsewhere surpassed. All the arts by which social life is animated and embellished were yet flourishing among them. The ministers of religion were for the most part faithful to that sacred trust, and were rewarded by the attachment and reverence of their disciples. Such of the precepts of religion as enjoin compassion to the wretched and the poor were generally observed with a ready mind. Nowhere was intellectual culture more widely diffused or more productive of blameless and elevating delights.

All this, and much more than this, we may rejoice to



believe and to acknowledge, while yet we maintain that the debasement of the court, of the dependants and of the immediate neighbours of the absolute king, was acting as a deadly contagion and a moral pestilence throughout the land. That absolute rule, by depriving the people of all self-government, had also deprived them of all self-reliance. By excluding them from any share in the conduct of public affairs, it had forbidden them to understand, to study, or to heed the great interests of their native country. The unblushing selfishness of the powerful, and of the aspirants to power, had taught the subject multitude to withhold all faith from those to whom their allegiance and submission were due. A fatal association was established in the minds of men between illustrious rank and debasing profligacy. The habitual and shameless perfidy of the later Bourbons, in the international relations of France, had contributed much to depose truth and honour from their legitimate supremacy within the limits of their own kingdom. Even Christianity had been made to pass rather as a pretext for injustice and oppression, than as the bond and cementing principle of human society. Atrocious cruelties perpetrated in that sacred name—cruelties from which the worst of heathen persecutors would have revolted—generated a sanguinary and hard-hearted spirit of which a later generation was to gather in the deadly harvest. The ligatures of the whole body politic were relaxed and dissolved by those whose especial duty it was to bind them close and to maintain them unbroken. With the departure of the yet higher moral sentiments on which the stability of the state depends, even the old hereditary loyalty of Frenchmen had disappeared; degenerating from a deeply rooted passion of the heart, to a mere toy of the imagination, to be broken, like other playthings, at the first childish caprice. That which ought to have been the light of the land had become darkness—a darkness under

which had grown up that state of manners and of morals which I have been depicting—the tragi-comic prelude to that dismal tragedy during the successive acts of which two generations of men have lived and died, amidst dark forebodings of the yet approaching, and perhaps yet more terrible catastrophe.

## LECTURE XXVII.

THE GROWTH OF THE FRENCH AND THE ENGLISH  
MONARCHIES COMPARED.

“How did it happen,” asks Voltaire, “that, setting out from the same point of departure, the governments of England and of France arrived, at nearly the same time, at results as dissimilar as the constitution of Venice is unlike that of Morocco?”

The object of all my preceding lectures has been to answer that question so far as it relates to France. To answer it fully, in relation to England, would require me to make a still larger demand on your time than I have already made. The subject is far too extensive to be discussed accurately, or even intelligibly, in any brief space; and yet it is too important to be altogether passed over in silence. I propose, therefore, at present, merely to lay before you what I regard as the substance of the answer to the problem which I have stated, reserving for some future time the more complete exposition and defence of what I am about to offer. I must begin, however, by taking a very rapid retrospect of the ground which we have already traversed.

It was long doubtful whether the empire of the Western world would belong to the Roman or to the Gallic people. If, in the result of the protracted struggle between them, those whom Rome called barbarians had triumphed, our poets would now have been writing "Lays of Ancient Gaul," founded on a basis at once more romantic, and more certain, than the existing legends of Livy. For while the inhabitants of the Seven Hills were engaged in an obscure warfare with the petty towns and villages of Central Italy, the people of Gaul were extending their power over the western limits both of the Asiatic and of the European continents, and were leaving an indelible impression of their name and language, from Galatia, to Gallicia and Portugal, and from Galway, to Galloway and Galles or Wales. Of all the nations over whom triumphs had been celebrated at the capitol, none had herself won so many conquests, and none gave so large an accession of strength and glory to the all-conquering republic.

Gaul ceased to be a nation without becoming, in sentiment or in spirit, an integral member of the empire. Her civic institutions no longer imparted security, honour, or advantage to the citizens. Her agriculture withered away under fiscal oppression. Vast tracts of country were abandoned to barrenness. Large parts of her territory were cultivated not by freemen but by slaves. Her ancient language gave place to that of her conquerors, and the melancholy triumphs of despotism were incomplete only because the Church mitigated the calamities which even she was unable to avert.

Gaul, therefore, fell an easy prey to her German invaders. They settled in the south and in the east, to relieve rather than to augment her sufferings; but the barbarous Franks dispossessed the Gallic proprietors of the north and of the west of a large part of the soil, and, to a great extent, even of their personal freedom. Though the long-haired

Merovings ruled from the Ebro to the Meuse, and over the whole of Western Germany, it was a nominal rather than a real dominion,—the ill-cemented alliance of a multitude of independent and half-savage chiefs, who, acknowledging the titular supremacy of the royal race, the supposed descendants of the gods, yielded them no effective obedience, nor any enduring attachment. The Merovingian kings discharged none of the essential attributes of sovereignty, but afforded the shelter of their name, and of their nominal power, to the growth of an aristocracy which, dividing among them the land and its inhabitants, prepared the way for the development of the feudal system.

From the centre of that aristocracy emerged a family, yet more distinguished by their hereditary genius than by their predominant authority. The third in succession of that lineage, Pepin le Bref, deprived the last of the Merovings of his titular crown. From Pepin it passed to Charlemagne—the most illustrious of all the founders of empire; if such glory be measured by the personal qualities of those by whom empire is acquired and maintained. For Charlemagne may be said to have been born prematurely, and to have belonged, by his character, by his tastes, and by his aspirations, to the 18th rather than to the 8th century. In the very depth of that night of ignorance, which was interposed between the ancient and the modern civilisation of Europe, he emulated the profound policy of Augustus, and anticipated the soaring ambition of Napoleon.

But when the powerful grasp of Charlemagne might no longer hold together the dominions which he had won, they were rapidly dissolved into their original elements. Gaul, or as she was henceforth called, France, first shook off her dependence on the German or foreign yoke, and then split into as many internal divisions as there were chieftains capable of exempting themselves from the control of the Carlovingian kings. A new territorial aristo-

cracy divided the lands among them. Another family, destined, like that of Pepin, to be the founders of a new dynasty, arose in the midst of the consequent anarchical confusion. Robert the Strong transmitted to his descendants the duchy of France, until at length, in the person of Hugues Capet, they acquired the title of kings of the French people.

It was at first, however, little more than a title. The feudal oligarchs were the real sovereigns of France. They became the founders of a polity of which, till then, the world had seen no example, but of which, since then, the world has never ceased to feel the influence. The feudal system was a scheme of government which the subtle intellect of the Normans first subjected to positive rules founded upon general principles. It was a system derived from the combination of many concurrent elements, such as the patriarchal spirit of the old German tribes,—the territorial grants made by the leaders of the German invasions to their military chieftains,—the subdivision of those grants by them amongst their own followers,—the conditions of military service on which all such grants were made,—and the necessity which in that age constrained every one either to seek protection as a client, or to afford it as a patron.

It was, however, an iron despotism. A feudal peer or baron of France was, within his own fief, not merely an absolute monarch, but a monarch invested with powers which, in every other form of feudal government, have been regarded as incompatible with each other. He could make war or peace with any other feudatory. He could make laws (with the consent of his chief vassals) for the government of his fief and of all persons sojourning within its limits. He was not subject to any law made without his own consent by the king, or by any other lawgivers. He was the supreme judge in all cases arising within his fief, and over all the inhabitants of it. He

might coin and issue money in his own name, and at his own discretion. He was not liable to pay any tribute to the king, his suzerain, excepting only such dues as were imposed by the express conditions of the grant under which his feudal estate was holden. He was himself the suzerain of whom all his vassals held their lands. He was not only the lord of the freemen, but, to a great extent, the proprietor of the serfs, living within his domain.

I have already referred you to the works of Dr. Robertson, of Mr. Hallam, and of M. Guizot, for an explanation of this singular scheme of government, whether considered as a body of laws, or as a system of national policy, or as a code of moral sentiments. From those great writers you will collect, that no dominion less stern, and no maxims less arbitrary, could have prepared mankind in the Middle Ages for the happier condition which awaited them in more civilised, though distant, times. It formed the indispensable, though the terrible, discipline of generations which had been trained up in barbarism and in personal servitude. It was, therefore, destined to be a state of transition, and to be itself subverted by changes sometimes abrupt, but, more usually, gradual and imperceptible. The history of France under the Capetien kings may be said to consist of the record of those changes. That history describes the successive stages of the protracted contest which terminated first in the triumph of the successors of Hugues Capet over the feudal confederation, and then in the subversion of the feudal system in all its principles, and in all its details, by the great revolutionary movements which marked the close of the 18th century.

It has, therefore, been my object hitherto, to consider each in order of the more considerable steps which led to this result, till the close of the reign of Louis XIV. With that view I attempted to explain, how the enfranchisement of the communes, and the consequent growth of the

municipal institutions of France, strengthened the royal power, and called into existence the Tiers Etat as a counterpoise to the authority of the feudal aristocracy. I then considered how the Eastern crusades diminished the number of the feudal serfs and vassals — how they increased the strength and the number of the communes in which the feudal power had its natural and inveterate antagonists — how they tended to terminate the private wars by which the seigneurs asserted and maintained their authority — how they contributed to restore the Roman law in France, and, therefore, to subvert the customs which formed the basis of the feudal dominion — how they promoted a change in the judicial institutions by which the seigneurs administered the law — how they were often fatal to the ancient relations of the feudatories and the royal suzerains to each other — how they tended to impair the power of the feudal chiefs by changing the whole military system of Europe — how they gave to the kings of France a new militia in the great military and religious orders — and how, by promoting commerce and literature, they nurtured the most deadly antagonists of the feudal despotism.

I next pointed out how the Albigenian crusades, coinciding with the annexation to the Crown of Normandy and Champagne, brought within the limits of the royal authority the countries extending from the Alps to the Pyrenees, and depressed, in the same proportion, the power of the seigniorial confederation.

The assumption by St. Louis of a legislative authority, at first co-ordinate with, and then superior to, that of the seigneurs of the Royal Domain, but which was ultimately destined to supersede the feudal right of legislation in all the fiefs of France, was the next subject of our inquiries.

I then endeavoured to show how the same monarch, by depriving the barons of the right of private war, and of trial by battle, laid the foundation of a new judicial



system, by which the power, which they had so long exercised as judges in their respective fiefs, was gradually subverted.

Such were the principal, though not the only, causes to which I referred the triumph of the Capetien kings over the only body in the state which presented itself as a rival to their power. By means of that triumph they were enabled to acquire, or to assume, prerogatives so vast, as, in the result, to substitute a royal, for a feudal, despotism. Yet in France, as in England, there were many influences tending to counteract and to repel this usurpation. There, as here, the privileged orders, noble and sacerdotal, enjoyed great wealth, and still greater authority. The French, not less than the English courts of justice were the natural guardians of the rights and franchises of all the people of the realm. The municipal corporations of that kingdom, as of our own, possessed the means of defending the national liberties. The representatives of the French people were elected on a more popular suffrage, and on a wider basis, than the representatives of the people of England; and, like them, were convened to assist their sovereigns with their advice and with pecuniary grants. The States General claimed the power of the purse as distinctly as the House of Commons, and often maintained that power with equal firmness. The Calvinists of France were in no respect inferior to our own Puritans in zeal for freedom of conscience, and, as its inevitable result, for constitutional freedom; and, in their active efforts to obtain those blessings, they were unrivalled by their co-religionists in this country. And, finally, our national self-esteem will, I think, hardly persuade us that the pen was ever employed amongst our own ancestors by writers of more persuasive eloquence, or of more enlarged and liberal minds, than the great authors who wielded that mighty instrument of power amongst our neighbours. I therefore attempted, at some

length, to explain why neither the privileged orders, — nor the judicial order, — nor the municipalities, — nor the States General, — nor the reformers, — nor the men of letters of France, were able to stem the current which bore her forwards to what Voltaire calls a resemblance to the government of Morocco.

My last general object has been to show, by some few illustrations, what that despotic authority really was, and how it was administered from the time when Henry IV. first acquired the undisputed possession of his throne, to the time when Louis XIV. conducted the government of France in person. If absolute power could ever be fitly confided to mortal man, where could nobler depositaries of that high trust have been found than in the succession of great men who filled up that interval in the history of their country? What ruler of mankind was ever gifted with a spirit more genial, or with views more comprehensive, than those of Henry IV.? — or with an integrity and a patriotism more noble than that of Sully? — or with an energy of will superior to that of Richelieu? — or with subtlety more profound than that of Mazarin? — or with a zeal and activity surpassing that of Colbert? — or with greater decision of character than Louvois? — or with a majesty transcending that of Louis XIV.? And yet, what were the results of so much genius and intellectual power when entrusted with political powers so vast and unrestricted? The favourable result was, to add to the greatness of France, and to give birth to some undying traditions, pointing to a still more extensive aggrandisement. The unfavourable results were, to produce every possible variety of internal, and of external, misgovernment — to promote wars more sanguinary than had ever before been waged between Christian nations — to produce a waste of treasure so vast, that the simple truth seems fabulous — to excite a protracted civil war — to create artificial famines by absurd commercial restrictions in a country

blessed beyond all other European states with a fertile soil, and a genial climate — to kindle persecutions which altogether eclipse, in their enormity, those to which the early Christians were subjected by the emperors of Rome — to subject the territories of the belligerent neighbours of France to desolations for a comparison to which we must look back to the histories of the Huns and the Vandals — and to corrupt the moral sense of the people by the exhibition at the court of their sovereigns of a profligacy of manners resembling that of an Asiatic, rather than that of an European monarchy.

It would be easy, but it would hardly be useful, to enlarge the catalogue of the calamities in which France was involved by the absolute dominion to which her rulers had been conducted, first, by their conquest over their feudal antagonists, and then, by the inability of the aristocratic, the judicial, the municipal, the representative, the religious, and the literary institutions of the kingdom to balance and to restrain their power. It is enough if we learn to regard such despotism with irreconcilable aversion, and to study with diligence, and to remember with gratitude, the causes to which we are indebted for our own hereditary exemption from it.

Such being the answer which I have already attempted to return to Voltaire's question, so far as it relates to France, I pass on to inquire what were the chief causes which, during the same period, conducted our own land to the possession of those constitutional franchises of which, at the present hour, we are still the undisputed inheritors? It is not, I confess, without some reluctance, that I enter on topics at all times so trite and so familiar, and which, in very recent times, have been discussed by Mr. Hallam, and by M. Guizot, and more especially by Sir Francis Palgrave, with such a prodigality of learning, and in so rich and measured a flow of judicial eloquence. Yet I may not forget, that misgivings similar to these would ob-

struct no small part of all our academical studies — that all elementary teaching must, to a great extent, be but the repetition of common-places — that the history of our national liberties has for us an interest which may well be regarded as inexhaustible — that it has aspects almost as numerous, and as distinguishable from each other, as are the minds by which it is contemplated — and that even they who are most unworthy to aspire to an equality, or to a competition, with the great authors I have mentioned, may at least illustrate and verify their conclusions, and may even venture occasionally to dispute and correct them.

While the Goths, the Burgundians, and the Franks were effecting the conquest and the occupation of Gaul, the Saxons were overrunning the whole of Great Britain south of the Grampians. Their national name, at first confined to the inhabitants of the territories between the Elbe and the Eyder, progressively embraced all the tribes or peoples dwelling between the Weser, the Ems, and the Rhine. It was not till the middle of the 5th century that they first appeared in force in this island; but, within 150 years from that time, they had founded here the eight kingdoms of Kent, Sussex, Wessex, Essex, East Anglia, Bernecia, Deira, and Mercia. Gradually retreating before them, a large part of the British or Celtic natives of the soil took refuge in the western mountains, or, crossing the Channel, established themselves on the Armorican peninsula, which has ever since borne from them the name of Bretagne.

The theory that the whole of the ancient British population were driven by their conquerors, either into Wales or into Bretagne, rests chiefly, perhaps exclusively, on the indisputable fact, that, not long after the Conquest, the Celtic had been entirely superseded by the German language. For, with the exception of some few of the more prominent natural features of our country, such as our broader rivers and loftier mountains, the name of almost

every object which meets the eye, from the Grampians to the South Downs, from the Severn to the eastern ocean, is derived from the Saxon tongue. Here and there some local vestiges of the British, Roman, or Scandinavian nomenclatures perpetuate the memory of still earlier, or still later, vicissitudes of our national fortunes; but our villages, our towns, our hundreds, and our counties—the animals which depasture our fields—the birds native to our climate—the indigenous plants which we cultivate—the products of our mines—our common trades and mechanical arts—the utensils we employ in them—the members of our bodies—the ordinary actions of our lives—and whatever is idiomatic, pungent, and forcible in our common speech, all bear their concurrent testimony to the fact, that we descend from those with whom the language of Saxony was once vernacular. With less distinctness, indeed, yet with no real doubt, our laws and our institutions attest the same genealogy.

I reject, however, as altogether improbable and gratuitous, the hypothesis of the exile into Wales or Bretagne, of the whole of the native British population who escaped the sword of the German conquerors. A large proportion of them were probably included in that great body of slaves, prædial and domestic, of whom we meet with such frequent mention in the annals of those times. That, in that servitude, they were tardily, but effectually, exterminated, will seem incredible to no one who is aware how, even in our own days, the aboriginal races in all newly discovered territories waste away, and at length disappear in the presence of their more hardy, enterprising, and civilised invaders. Be this as it may, it is at least clear, that, during five successive centuries, the lowlands of our island were chiefly peopled, and were exclusively governed, by members of the great Teutonic family. *In France, throughout the same period, there was a vast numerical preponderance of the Gallic, or Romano-Gallic, over the Teutonic element of*

society. What was the effect of the slow and imperfect fusion of the two races in that kingdom, I have attempted, in a former lecture, to explain. What was the effect of the undisturbed development of the German habits of thought and action in our own land, it remains for us to inquire.

I have already avowed my belief, that to each of the nations of the earth belongs, by a divine decree, a distinctive character adapted to the peculiar office assigned to each, in the great and comprehensive system of human affairs. Thus to France was appointed, by the Supreme Ruler of mankind, the duty of civilising and humanising the European world. To England it has been given to guide all other states to excellence in the practical arts of life, to commercial wealth, to political wisdom, and to spiritual liberty. But to Germany was delegated the highest and the noblest trust which has been committed to any people since the Hebrews, the Greeks, and the Romans fulfilled their respective commissions of imparting to our race the blessings of religion, of learning, and of law. For, in Germany, we revere the prolific mother of nations, the reformer of a corrupted Christianity, and the conservator of the liberties and independence of the European commonwealth. Weakened as she has been in defensive, as well as in aggressive, war, by the division of her territory into so many separate states, yet in that very weakness she has found her strength, in the unambitious but beneficent career which, by the prescient will of the Creator himself, she was destined to pursue. The fathers of some of the most aged amongst us witnessed her first *assumption of her rank and proper station in the republic of letters*; and we ourselves are witnesses how, in *that comparatively new region of national prowess*, she has exhibited the same indestructible character which, more than a thousand years ago, enabled her to lay in this island the basis of a government, of which (if our posterity be true

to their trust) another thousand years will scarcely witness the subversion. That England has her patrimony on the seas, France on the land, and Germany in the clouds, is a sarcasm at which the German may well afford to smile. For reverence in the contemplation of whatever is elevated, and imagination in the embellishment of whatever is beautiful, and tenderness in cherishing whatever is lovely, and patience in the pursuit of the most recondite truths, and courage in the avowal of every deliberate conviction, and charity in tolerating every form of honest dissent — these are now, as they have ever been, the vital elements of the Teutonic mind. They may, indeed, not seldom have given birth to an unmeaning mysticism, to visionary hopes, and to dangerous errors. Yet, from their remotest ancestry, the Germans have received these gifts as their best and most enduring inheritance ; and, by the exercise and the influence of them, they impressed upon our own ancestral constitution much of that peculiar character which it retains to the present hour.

“ By the word constitution,” says Lord Bolingbroke, “ we mean, whenever we speak with propriety and exactness, the assemblage of laws, institutions, and customs, derived from certain fixed principles of reason, directed to certain fixed objects of public good, that compose the general system by which the community hath agreed to be governed.” Assuming the accuracy of this definition, I infer from it, that we must seek the constitution of any commonwealth, and, therefore, of our own, not in the organic structure of its government, but in the living spirit by which it is habitually animated ; not in a rigid analysis of the rights and the functions of the various orders of the citizens, so much as in the primæval tendencies, the cherished habits, and the venerated maxims by which the national polity has been moulded and directed. I therefore proceed to inquire, What are those principles of our English monarchy, which, having been first established by

our Anglo-Saxon progenitors, have, from their age to our own, retained among us a perennial and an undisputed dominion ?

First, then, whether we listen to the invectives of our neighbours, or to the taunts of some of the most eloquent, though not, I think, the wisest of our fellow countrymen, we are required to condemn and to subvert those hereditary distinctions which elevate some, and depress the rest, of the ranks of society amongst us. Declining this, and all the other controversies of our age, I limit myself to the statement and the proof of the fact, that an aristocracy of birth has ever been among the most active elements of our constitutional polity.

The Anglo-Saxon people were divided into the five classes of kings, nobles, vavasours, ceorls, and slaves — ranks transmitted by inheritance, from one generation to another, and which became the salient fountains of the whole body of our national laws, of our most cherished rights, and of our most popular privileges.

First in order, in this political hierarchy, was what, for want of a more appropriate word, may be called the Royal Caste. Over each of the component kingdoms of the Hephtharchy, or, as it ought to be called, the Octarchy, reigned a monarch, who was designated sometimes as the Kyning, and sometimes as the Ealderman. In the belief of his subjects he was one of the descendants of Odin or Woden, whose name, under various modifications, was revered from the shores of the polar sea to the eastern verge of the Caucasian mountains. For that reason, the descent of the crown was strictly limited to the royal, or rather to the sacred line. Yet it was not invariably a lineal descent. The collateral was not seldom preferred to the direct heir — the brother, for example, to the son of the last Kyning.

But, in the persons of Athelstane and his successors, the Anglo-Saxon realms were united into one confederation, though not incorporated into one kingdom. Over these



confederate states reigned a sovereign, to whom his people gave the name of Brettwalda—that is, the wielder or ruler of Britain. Thus Athelstane was Brettwalda of the whole of Albion. The men of Kent and the men of Sussex were alike his subjects; but they were not fellow citizens. He was not only the king of eight adjacent and rival states, but was also the mediator between them. To maintain the principle and the permanency of this federal union, the powers of the Brettwalda over each member of it were, therefore, greater than the powers of any one of the Ealdermen, or Kynings, in his own dominion; just (to use a very modern illustration) as the Congress of the United States has higher legislative functions, and, as their supreme court, has higher judicial functions throughout the whole republic, than the legislatures, or than the tribunals, of the component states possess within their several jurisdictions.

Next in rank in the Anglo-Saxon commonwealth were the nobles—designated either as Earls or Thaness. That dignity, when combined with a certain extent and description of territorial property, carried with it high powers, both civil and military. Men of noble birth, when destitute of such property, were also destitute of any political power. But they had privileges from which the inferior members of society were excluded. Thus, even the monk in his cloister, and the priest in his cathedral (if of noble lineage), claimed and received the honours due to their descent. The word Vavasours, though of later origin, best designates this part of the Anglo-Saxon society. •

To the nobles succeeded the Ceorls, or Commons of the realm. Though liable to many burdensome obligations, resulting from the relation in which they stood to their earls or lords, they were regarded by others, and by themselves, as freemen. They corresponded to the class which we now call the Yeomanry, or to the Tiers Etat of France.

All freemen, who were not themselves lords, were bound to live in subjection to some lord, to whom they swore

fealty, and whose banner they followed in war. But the vavasour might choose his own lord, that is, he might attach, or, as it was called, commend, himself to any lord who would accept his homage. The ceorl, on the other hand, was a tenant attached to a particular lordship, on which he was required to live, and where he was bound to render to his lord certain fixed services, either personal or pecuniary. Yet the ceorl had often an usufructuary title to some definite amount of land within the precincts of the lordship. From that home he could not be ejected; and if he possessed the means of purchasing a discharge from his adscription or attachment to the soil, the lord could not refuse so to enfranchise him. A ceorl, destitute of such a home, was compelled to find a master who would accept him as a labourer and as an inmate in his household.

These distinctions of rank among freemen were not, however, indelible. A merchant who had thrice crossed the sea at his own expense, obtained the dignity of a thane. A ceorl who could acquire, in his own right, five hydes of land, ascended to the same rank. His descendants, in the third generation, if retaining the land, were considered as vavasours, that is, as men of gentle blood and kindred, and as entitled to all the privileges of noble birth.

Finally. The slave, who filled the lowest station in the Anglo-Saxon community, was *res not persona*, and as destitute of all political rights and franchises as the bullocks with whom he laboured.

Such having been the divisions of society among the Anglo-Saxons, I observe, further that in their age, as in our own, it was a principle of the constitution of this kingdom that the powers of the state should, as little as possible, be combined in a central government, and should, as much as possible, be distributed amongst the provincial or local authorities; and that this rule was especially observed regarding the administration of justice.

In all modern kingdoms sovereignty is territorial. In all the mediæval kingdoms it was patriarchal. We consider all men as the subjects of him who reigns over their settled place of abode. Our German forefathers considered all men as subject to the monarch of the tribe or confederacy within which they were born. After the tribe had become sedentary, they still gathered round their chieftain, and acknowledged his dominion. In this island his domain was called a town or township, — a word of which the Norman term manor has since taken the place. The chieftain was the proprietor of the whole of that domain. He was the actual possessor only of a part of it; the rest was granted to his followers as tenants, either for their lives or for other terms; or was left as open fields or commons, of which the lord and his tenants had a kind of joint occupation.

In each township the lord, with the concurrence of his tenants, held courts of justice, then called townmotes, which exist among us at the present hour, under the name of courts leet, or courts baron. The conservation of the public peace was entrusted to the inhabitants of the township collectively. An officer, called the townreeve, appointed by the lord, and four good and lawful men of the township, elected by the inhabitants, represented it at the folkmote, or local assembly of the hundred.

The court of the hundred, or folkmote, was composed of all the lords and thanes whose townships were included within that district, — of the townreeve and four men already mentioned, representing every such township, — of the bishop of the diocese, — and of an earl, who acted as the president of the assembly. The folkmote was at once a court of justice (penal and civil) for the hundred, and a meeting for attesting and perpetuating the memory of a variety of acts, of which, in those days, no written record could be made. Such, for example, were the sale of lands,

the payment for them, the enfranchisement of serfs, and the like.

Next in the ascending scale of the local courts of the Anglo-Saxons were the shiremotes, or county courts. Our English counties have their origin from two sources. Some of them are ancient kingdoms reduced to the rank of provinces; others are the dismemberments of such kingdoms. In either case the shire was placed under the authority of an earl. In each shire two shiremotes were holden annually. Sometimes those bodies acted as ecclesiastical synods, under the presidency of the bishop; sometimes as secular courts, under the presidency of the earl, or of the shirereeve, his deputy. The shiremote was the grand inquest of the county. Every hundred was represented there by twelve men, and each township by the townreeve and the four men already mentioned. It was the office of such attendants, or representatives, to present to the court the grievances of their respective hundreds or townships. It was the office of the court to take cognisance of all such grievances,—of all crimes committed within the county,—of all complaints of the abuse of power by any subordinate officers,—and of all appeals from the judgments of the township or the hundred courts.

Such having been the distribution of political and of judicial powers in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom, I next observe, that in that, as in all subsequent ages, the Church of England and the realm of England were co-extensive,—that (in theory at least) each embraced, within its appropriate sphere, all the people of England,—and that the ecclesiastical and civil states were intimately allied or united to each other. So intimate, indeed, was that union, that each kingdom of the Octarchy constituted a distinct diocese, and every such diocese was considered as a single parish, of which the bishop was

the incumbent. By him presbyters were appointed to officiate in the various districts, civic or rural; and by him the annual revenues of the see were appropriated, first, for the maintenance of divine service; then for the relief of the poor; and, finally, for the support of the clergy. The clerks and the laymen then lived under the same code, civil and penal; and, though the exposition of the faith was considered as the peculiar province of synods, the regulation and enforcement of ecclesiastical discipline belonged to the temporal legislature and tribunals. The king was the patron of all vacant bishoprics, and granted them, by royal writs or charters, without either the previous concurrence of the clergy, or the subsequent sanction of the pope. If the State thus encroached on the province of the Church, the Church, in turn, assumed some of the functions of the temporal government. The clerical order in those times were in the exclusive possession of the art of writing, and, therefore, of many of the higher secular offices. As by them all royal charters were prepared and transcribed, so they were the keepers or depositaries of them. To the clergy, also, it thus belonged to devise and issue those royal mandates, or writs, which then, as now, were the foundation of all civil actions. Hence arose the Chancery, or *Officina Brevium*; and hence, also, was chiefly derived that peculiarity of the English judicial system,—the jurisdiction of a judge of equity, whose province it is to supply the defects, and to mitigate the rigour, of the ordinary administration of justice.

I proceed to remark that, from the era of our earliest Anglo-Saxon records, England has never acknowledged any other than a monarchical government. In the Anglo-Saxon king, or *Bretwalda*, resided in theory (if not in fact) all the powers of the state, and from him flowed, or were supposed to flow, all offices and dignities subordinate to his own.

Thus, he was in all causes the great and the ultimate judge. As the supreme lord or suzerain of the realm, all his thanes were amenable to his judicial authority. As commander-in-chief of the military forces of the state, all offences committed *sub vexillâ* came within his cognisance. As sovereign of all the denizens of his kingdom, he punished all offences accompanied by violence or rapine;—remedied the defects of the law which he administered;—supplied the omissions of it when it was silent;—infused energy into the administration of it when it was feeble,—and mitigated the severity of it when it was oppressive or burdensome. As judge of appeal, he afforded redress to any suitor who had sought it in vain in the hundred or county courts. As owner of the four great roads which traversed the island, from east to west, and from north to south, he had a special care of all who travelled along them; and crimes committed on the king's highway thus came to be regarded as falling especially within the jurisdiction of the king.

His presence, his vicinity, or his express grant, carried with it a special protection, which was called the king's peace. It was a privilege which always prevailed throughout a circle of which his mansion was the centre, and of which, for some mystic reason, the radius measured three miles, added to three furlongs, three acre breadths, nine feet, nine palms, and three barleycorns.

On his coronation, and at the three great festivals of the Church, the king's peace was extended throughout the whole realm. All violations of it were considered as injuries to the king himself, and rendered the transgressor amenable immediately to his penal jurisdiction.

The judicial powers thus vested in the Brettwalda were exercised by him in person. Thus Edgar made two judicial circuits in each year, and Canute appears to have observed the same practice. Such royal visitations were, indeed, indispensable at a time when each of the component

states, or the kingdom of Britain, still retained laws and customs peculiar to itself, and was under the rule of earls or viceroys, whose abuse of power could be arrested by no other means.

But the Anglo-Saxon king, or Brettwalda, had many other than these judicial prerogatives. He was the patron of all the dignities and offices of his government, appointing, and at his pleasure displacing, the aldermen, earls, thanes, sheriffs, heretarchs, and all other great functionaries, civil or military.

He was in possession of large revenues. His royal domains were nearly equal to the domains of all his principal chieftains combined together. He received customs at every seaport, and tolls in all open markets. He was entitled to money payments from every incorporated city or borough, in commutation of the services due to him from the citizens. Heriots were rendered to him on the death of all his thanes, and to him were paid the forfeitures imposed on offenders in various cases of conviction from crimes.

But his highest prerogative was that of legislation, which, however, he exercised in concurrence with the wittenagemote. For, even in that remote age, England was never destitute of assemblies, meeting under the presidency of the king of England, for the enactment and promulgation of laws.

Each of the component kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxon monarchy had a separate wittenagemote, or council of the wise. Probably this may in each have been but another name for the shiremate, or county court, already mentioned. But concurrently with them the Brettwalda, or king of Britain, held a general wittenagemote, or diet, of the kingdom at large. At every such assembly he presented himself to his subjects in all the splendour of royalty. There also appeared all the prelates of the realm, the ealdermen, the earls, and the thanes, of each

of the states, or minor kingdoms, or shires, over which he was supreme; and all the high officers of his government, both lay and clerical. In this supreme wittenagemote laws were enacted in the name of the Brettwalda. In terms, at least, the authority of them was co-extensive with the limits of his dominions. But, in fact, the acceptance of such laws, by what may be called the local or inferior legislature, was essential to their validity within the precincts of each. Thus we learn that the laws of Edgar were long rejected in Mercia, those of Athelstane in Kent, and those of Canute in Northumberland.

But the wittenagemote was not merely a legislature. They constituted also a court of criminal jurisdiction, and especially in cases in which an accusation, or, as we should now say, an impeachment, was preferred against any alderman or earl, or against any thane, who was an immediate vassal of the Crown.

The wittenagemote possessed, also, much of the character of a congress of independent powers, in which those whom we should describe as the great vassals of the Crown deliberated on all questions affecting their respective states or communities, and entered into compacts for raising money, or for the adoption of other measures required by the exigencies of the whole Anglo-Saxon commonwealth.

Mr. Sharon Turner has laboured to prove that the wittenagemote included members holding neither office nor dignity, but who appeared there as representatives of the absent vassals or citizens. He is contradicted on what appear to me conclusive grounds, by authorities more recent, and indeed much higher, than his own; and especially by Dr. Lingard and by Sir Francis Palgrave. It must, indeed, be confessed, that all inquiries into the composition, the rights, the powers, and the modes of procedure of this great assembly, are involved in an obscu-



city which the most profound research, the ripest learning, and the keenest subtlety of our most eminent antiquarians has not been able altogether to dispel. Yet no fact can be more exempt from reasonable doubt than that, during nearly two centuries before the Norman Conquest, a national assembly, comprising such dignitaries, and habitually exercising such functions as I have mentioned, formed, under the Anglo-Saxon kings, one great element of our national government and constitution.

Such were the main fundamental principles of the Anglo-Saxon constitution, — principles which may, with ease, be dogmatically stated, but which can hardly be understood aright except as they are illustrated by the laws, the arts, the manners, and the literature of the Anglo-Saxon people. What these were may be learnt from Mr. Sharon Turner, of whom M. Guizot says that he has diligently collected an abundance of facts, but possesses few ideas. If that censure were better founded than it really is, it would not, perhaps, derogate much from the esteem in which that wise and amiable writer is held by us, his fellow-countrymen. For we are accustomed to think that history and philosophy have each their own appropriate spheres — that each should inform and be infused into the other, not confounded with it — and that a complete, luminous, and accurate narrative of events may reasonably be preferred by an historian to the most subtle explication of their connecting principles.

If Mr. Sharon Turner's speculative wisdom be not very redundant, it is at least copious enough to establish the fact, that Teutonic ideas and Teutonic habits were planted by the Saxons in England, as they had been by the Goths, the Burgundians, and the Franks in France. But the growth of those ideas and habits was more active here than there, and the development of them far more complete; for, in this island, the German race, alloyed by no foreign admixture (the Danes were but another branch of the

great Saxon family), had, long before the Norman invasion, impressed upon our people a character at once peculiar, indigenous, and indestructible. From them our fathers' fathers inherited, and have transmitted to our own generation, a body of opinions; of maxims, and of moral sentiments, in which may be found, for their polity and for our polity, a common root, and origin, and lineage. That their Brettwalda and our Queen — their earls and thanes and our nobility — their shiremotes and our circuit courts — their wittenagemote and our parliament, were so many constituted authorities identical in all things except in the epochs in which they flourished, and in the names by which they were designated, — is, indeed, only one of those pleasant dreams which haunt and animate the antiquarian as he treads his dry and dusty path. But that, under the widest diversities of forms, there is yet much real sameness of substance between the institutions of England as they formerly existed in the 9th, and as they actually exist in the 19th century, is a fact susceptible of the clearest proof, and replete with the deepest interest. Nor is the cause of this unbroken continuity doubtful or obscure. Beyond all Western nations, the Germans possess that immutability of character and of habits by which the Oriental races are distinguished; but with the difference that, in the East, an abject superstition and an inert passiveness — in Germany, a solemn imagination — has ever attached the living to the dead, and to those who are yet to live. Serious, dutiful, and meditative, they inhabited this island a thousand years ago, as they inhabit their own fatherland now, in patriarchal thoughtfulness, dwelling less in the passing hour than in the generations which are yet to come, and in the generations which have long since passed away. I will attempt, in the fewest possible words, to show how great is the conformity between the living spirit of the institutions which they created, and to which I have already re-

ferred, and that of the institutions under which we actually live.

First, then, that wide inequality between the different ranks and orders of our people which distinguishes our nation at the present day, has been characteristic of it since the days of Edgar and Athelstane. The aristocratic spirit has, at all times, pervaded and animated the English commonwealth; but not the aristocracy of birth alone. In the times of the Brettwaldas, successful merit might rise to the privileges of noble descent as freely as in those of Elizabeth or of Victoria. Political power was, indeed, never dissociated from property. The law which exacts from every member of the House of Commons a certain proprietary qualification in land, is but the republication, in a new form, of a law which was in force at the shire-motes and at the wittenagemotes of our remote progenitors; for to them it was known by a natural sagacity, as it is known to us by a wider experience, that power and property, if not bound together in a strict alliance, will be arrayed against each other in a deadly hostility. Yet power in the state, and the advantages which such power conveys, have never been confined to a single caste amongst us. It was the policy which our Saxon ancestors have transmitted to ourselves, to render such honours a prize for which all might contend, not an exclusive enjoyment in which a few might luxuriate. They aimed at an equality of rights, not at an equality of conditions. They sought to combine all ranks of free men into one body, not by depressing the noble to the level of the ignoble, but by enabling all men to acquire, by desert and industry, the benefits denied to them by fortune and by parentage. An untutored wisdom taught them that this is the one true and secure equality — the only structure of the social system by which the highest social qualities can be permanently called into exercise for the general good — the single polity which affords an adequate scope for dutifulness, for energy, and for hope in

those who aspire to rise; for vigilance, for self-improvement, for condescension, and for sympathy in those who have inherited from their fathers a position on the high places of the earth.

With the exception of the years which elapsed between the death of the first and the restoration of the second Charles, England has, during more than a thousand years, been under the rule of hereditary monarchs, who, either in fact or in theory, have wielded all the powers, and dispensed all the honours of the state. The prerogatives which our present sovereign exercises, through the agency of responsible advisers, are her inheritance from the Brettwaldas, who, as we have seen, exercised them in their own persons. If, at this day, fleets and armies are raised and commanded in the royal name—if all property, dedicated to public uses, is now vested in the Crown—if every stage of every suit or action is conducted by the queen's judicial officers, in obedience to the queen's writs or mandates—if, by her alone, war can be made, and peace restored—if all treaties with foreign powers be concluded only in her name—if at her pleasure, and under her great seal, all patents of nobility, and all grants of the higher offices of the state, are issued—if, by her, the legislature is summoned, prorogued, and dissolved—and if all our laws are enacted, not by the three estates of the realm, but by her majesty, with the advice and consent of those estates assembled in parliament—all these rights or usages form a part of the patrimony of the English Crown, which has descended upon her who wears it now, through each of the six dynasties by whom successively it has been worn. Such usages are, indeed, derided as so many obsolete legal fictions, by certain scoffers amongst us, who unceremoniously, if not irreverently, consign all such fictions to the limbo of imposture and of cant, or, in more fashionable phrase, of shams. Those monsters of the modern imagination have, it must be confessed, achieved great

triumphs; but, perhaps, none so great as their entire subjugation of the very writers who have thus most loudly proclaimed war against them, seeing that they are themselves, of all men, the most helpless slaves of cant, if thereby be meant the habitual substitution of certain favourite phrases for real and definite meanings. Wiser, though less witty, men will regard these fictions of our constitution as amongst its most sacred and invaluable elements. They survive, not as so many vain traditions of worn-out principles — not as the empty shadows of departed realities — but as the grave, though cautious, expression of living truths. They are a homage rendered to hoar antiquity, indeed, but rendered also to prerogatives which, though dormant, are not extinct. They are the records of exigencies which have arisen, and of exigencies which may yet arise, when, for the conservation of society at large, the prerogatives of the English Crown may be called into exercise in all their primæval force, and in all their still inherent vitality. In the meantime, the theory which recognises and does homage to these dormant prerogatives is not, in truth (as our facetious satirists imagine), merely fictitious. All who have studied the government of our land, not in books merely, or in magazines and newspapers, but from a close personal observation of it, will attest, that the personal powers of the Sovereign of England in the 19th century, tempered as they are by the comities of our age, and modified as they are by the forms in use amongst us, are yet powers not nominal but real; arduous enough to exercise the highest intellect, and large enough to satisfy the aspirations of the most ardent beneficence.

The monarchy of the ancient Brettwalda, as of our modern King, was a limited monarchy. From the days of Alfred and of Athelstane to these days, our sovereigns have reigned (every lover of our national liberties, if wise, will acknowledge that they have reigned) by divine right.

There is a deep and a generous philosophy, as well as a more than human wisdom, in the apostolic canon, that "the powers which be are ordained of God," — the powers symbolised, whether by the staff of the constable, or by the crown of the monarch. The servile maxims for which that doctrine has been made the pretext, are not legitimate deductions from it. They proceed on a total misapprehension of its real meaning. That meaning is, that all human power is indissolubly connected with a corresponding responsibility both to God as its author, and to man as the subject of it. In this spirit it was that, long before and long after the Norman Conquest, the coronation of our kings was regarded, not as an empty pageant, but as an act strictly essential to the assumption and use of their royal authority. For, at that solemn ceremony, a sacramental unction was (at least) supposed to impart to the English king a sacerdotal character, as the vicegerent amongst men of the King of kings. That sacred chrism rendered him, at least in popular belief, the anointed of the Lord ; but it also rendered him, in popular belief, and often in his own, amenable to those inevitable penalties which the Supreme Ruler of the world would inflict, or would sanction, if the king should violate the oath which he then took before his assembled people, to govern them in justice and in mercy.

But the limitation of the power of our kings, from the earliest to the latest times, has rested on a surer sanction than any oath, however solemn. To repeat what I have already had occasion to say on that subject in a preceding lecture, "our land has ever lived under the dominion of law. By that power the physical force of the many, the formidable influence of the few, and the arbitrary will of the monarch, have ever been controlled with more or less of energy and of success. This dominion of the law was exercised in the time of our Saxon progenitors in the folkmotes, the shiremotes, and the wittenagemotes ; in our

own times, in our courts of justice, and in our high courts of parliament. During more than a thousand years, our legal tribunals have been interposed between the various orders of the state, to vindicate the rights, and to arrest the encroachments of them all. Throughout that long course of ages those legal sanctuaries have been at once the bulwarks of order, and the strongholds of liberty, in England; and to them it is to be ascribed that the English Parliaments have never fallen, as the Cortes of Spain fell, or as the States General of France silently disappeared."

Since the age when England was governed by the House of Cerdic to the age in which the sceptre passed to the House of Brunswick, there has never been a period in which the powers of the English Crown have not been divided, balanced, and controlled, by the co-ordinate powers of the English legislature. No sovereign has ever sat on the throne of this realm except in virtue of a title created by some preceding enactment, or sanctioned by some subsequent recognition of the national legislature. No such sovereign has ever established a right to inscribe among our laws, edicts promulgated in the exercise of his own unaided prerogative. There never was a time when the lawgivers of our land were not armed with privileges, judicial and administrative, for their safeguard in the free discharge of that pre-eminent franchise.

There is, indeed, a loose and popular impression, that the Norman Conquest swept away all the institutions of the Anglo-Saxons, and among them the wittenagemote, substituting no other legislative body in its place. It is easy to detect the causes of that belief. In no other European history do we meet with any conquest which effected so complete, so abrupt, and so lasting a change in the state and fortunes of the conquered people. It has even become the era of our insular chronology; and, for reasons which I cannot now pause to explain, has gone far to obliterate the memory and the records of our earlier

political constitution. Yet no fact admits of readier, or of more complete, proof, than that all the most important of the legal customs, and legal principles, and national sentiments of England, beneath her Brettwaldas, were yet in force in England beneath William the Norman and his descendants to the fourth generation. New names, Norman or Latin, were indeed, in many cases, substituted for the Saxon titles. Thus to the wittenagemote succeeded the *curia regis*. But the two were really identical, though nominally distinct. For the most complete and triumphant proof of that fact, I would refer to a dissertation (obviously from the pen of the very learned Sir Francis Palgrave) which is to be found in the sixty-ninth number of the Edinburgh Review. It will enable any student to satisfy himself, that the parliament in which we and our forefathers have so long and so justly gloried, may be traced, through a long but unbroken genealogy, back to the Saxon assemblies which hailed the Confessor, and Canute, and Edgar, as their kings.

For the history of our commonwealth, from the earliest epoch to our own, is that of a people looking before and after, whose retrospect is unwearied, that their progress may be at once constant and secure. Amidst all the errors, and all the crimes, and all the miseries, which have disgraced and burdened our land, it has ever cherished reverence for the traditions, for the achievements, for the struggles, and for the sufferings, of preceding generations, — reverence for the church in which they worshipped, for the crown which they honoured, for the tribunals which they obeyed, and for the legislature which, at much cost of blood, and toil, and treasure, they perpetuated — reverence for the laws which they transmitted as a patrimony to their descendants — and reverence for the liberties which they bequeathed as a birthright to ourselves. Nor has our land ever yet been wanting in hope; in a hope sustained by an unfaltering faith in the expansive power of those



great principles, of which the truth has been tried by the severest tests, and has been proved alike in our good and in our evil fortunes. To improve, not to subvert — to adapt our institutions to the successive exigencies to which Time has given birth — to encounter and subdue evils, real and remediable, not evils imaginary, or inherent in the indestructible conditions of all human society — to abandon to the schools all Utopian reveries — to regard the constitution of the realm not as the absolute property of any one generation of men, but as a sacred trust for which each generation is in turn responsible — such (except during the Cromwellian usurpation) have been the invariable maxims of the English monarchy during a period exceeding that which intervened between the foundation and the extinction of the power of Rome.

To the question of Voltaire then, Why has England so long and so successfully maintained her free government, and her free institutions? I answer, because England is still, as she has always been, German; because her national franchises are the spontaneous and legitimate fruit of her national character; of that character, dutiful, serious, persevering, reverential, and hopeful, which has been transmitted to us from our Anglo-Saxon ancestors, and which it now remains for us to transmit to our remotest descendants.

Far different from this is the answer returned by M. Guizot in his "*Essai des Causes de l'Etablissement du Gouvernement Représentatif en l'Angleterre.*" The powers of that great writer were never exhibited with greater felicity than in that remarkable treatise, in which he traces the liberties of England to the relative positions into which the Conquest brought the Norman people and government on the one hand, and the Saxon people and nobles on the other hand. Luminous and comprehensive as is that commentary on our annals, I think it essentially defective, for the reasons which I have already mentioned; and even inaccu-

rate, for reasons which the time at my command will not allow me to mention. Yet to any one who wishes to pursue the inquiry which I proposed at the outset of this lecture, it would be impossible to recommend any guide who could be followed with greater confidence, with more advantage, or with equal pleasure.

Here, then, I close my Lectures on the internal government and domestic economy of France. If the necessary time and opportunity shall be allowed to me, I hope hereafter to consider the growth and the nature of that eminence to which, during the last three centuries, France attained in the European system; and the manner in which her foreign relations have contributed to mould the whole code of the international law of Christendom.

THE END.

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